

DAUGHTERS OF THE BIBLE OUT LOUD

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
Ordination

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Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

February 1, 2010:
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CHAPTER ONE: **WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM BIBLICAL DAUGHTERS?**

2 Samuel 12:3 reads *And the poor man had only one little ewe that he bought. He tended to her and she grew up together with him and his children. From his mouth, she would eat and from his cup, she would drink. And in his bosom, she would nestle. She was like a daughter to him.*¹ This verse presents us with a metaphoric image of a biblical daughter and allows us to draw certain assumptions. On the surface, the verse teaches that an ideal daughter should be cared for and loved intensely. As we delve into what this metaphor tells us about the ideal treatment of a daughter, we also begin to think about the role that a daughter plays in response to this kind of treatment. Can a biblical daughter act for herself? Does this ideal of intense caring stunt the independence of a biblical daughter?

The biblical text is written in the context of a patriarchal society. Patriarchal societies contain a clear-cut hierarchy, and men have a higher status than their female counterparts. “Technically, [patriarchy] means the rule of the father. In feminist literature, it includes androcentrism, misogyny, and sexism.”² In patriarchal societies, men are given power solely because they are men. Men make the laws, and those laws are generally concerned only with the rights of men and help to promulgate male power. Patriarchy is maintained by focusing on male power, and suppressing women. “Whatever

¹ All translations in this thesis are based on the JPS translation, with my own edits.

² Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 20.

the biological basis for male power, gender is always constructed culturally to protect and maintain male privilege.”³

In all roles - mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters – biblical women are disenfranchised simply because the biblical world is a patriarchal world in which men have immense power and control. “[T]he narrative of biblical women were shaped by patriarchal views and motives...ancient Israelite culture was dominated by men, a domination legitimated and reinforced by legal codes devised by men in a legal system enforced by men.”⁴ The few laws that refer to women are there to protect them as powerless victims, which actually restrains women in both the domestic and public spheres. These laws reinforce the notion of women as powerless and helpless. Women are forced to navigate the patriarchal landmines of power, where men make the laws that concern them and determine their future. “All of this paints a portrait of women with very little *de jure* political or economic autonomy.”⁵

Daughters, however, are the least powerful and most endangered women within a patriarchal society. “All children everywhere are vulnerable to the actions of their parents, and girls are even more so than boys. The most vulnerable people in a patriarchal society are daughters.”⁶ Their fate is entirely dependent upon the one man, their father, who will determine which other man they will marry. “The life of a young girl was dominated by considerations relating to her preparation and suitability for the state of

³ Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families* (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2000), 14.

⁴ Adriane B. Leveen, *Women Remaking American Judaism*, editor Riv-Ellen Prell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 86.

⁵ Susan Niditch, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, editor Judith R. Basikin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 30.

⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 99.

matrimony that was her destiny. Marketability as a wife depended largely on her virginity, Her father was therefore very concerned with preserving her virginity and honor...The father's right to sell or give his daughter in marriage and to annul her vows bespeaks his virtual control over her body, mind, and destiny."⁷ This speaks to our quote from 2 Samuel. A father does more than just provide food and drink for his daughter. In a sense, he will force-feed her all the major decisions that will affect her life. A biblical father determines with whom else his daughter will interact and form relationships. This is a perfect example of authoritarian parenting, which modern psycho-social theorists explain is a "a restrictive, punitive style in which the parents exhort the child to follow their directions and to respect work and effort. The authoritarian parent places firm limits and controls on the child and allows little verbal exchange."⁸ Theorists believe that this type of parenting stunts a child's ability to gain autonomy and develop his/her own identity.

Since, as just explained, a daughter is completely dependent on her father and he decides her future, it is their relationship that remains central. Robert Polhemus argues that the father-daughter relationship sets the standard for all power dynamics in the relationships between genders. "Generalizing, you might say that power relations between the sexes until very recent times would best be symbolized...by a father-daughter relationship."⁹ In fact, the father-daughter relationship of the bible is essential in understanding all other familial and gender relationships because this relationship is so

⁷ Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 112.

⁸ John W. Santrock, *Child Development*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2001), 464.

⁹ Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters: Sex, Redemption and Women's Quest for Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 9.

central to the life of a daughter. This is the relationship that teaches a daughter how to interact with others, including her own future husband.

Certainly, all parent-child relationships, biblical or modern, are unbalanced. Parents do much of the giving and providing, while children take. “[T]here could scarcely be a less balanced exchange. Parents support and nurture and educate and protect children with very little compensating benefit in return.”¹⁰ However, the father-daughter relationship of the bible is even more skewed than others because it is in the context of patriarchy and complete dependence of daughter upon father. 2 Samuel 12:3 sets forth an ideal that a father will do everything for his daughter, so a daughter becomes completely reliant upon her father.

It may be helpful to view this relationship through the lens of modern developmental theory. Bowen, in his Family Systems Theory, presents us with the relationship dynamic of overfunctioners and underfunctioners.¹¹ This relationship dynamic is based on both social context and gender, and is generally applied to romantic relationships but can be imposed on any intimate relationship. The overfunctioner has all the answers, tells the other what to do, think and feel, and even takes increasing responsibility for the other. In TaNaKh, fathers are the overfunctioners as they make all decisions and are fully responsible for their daughters, until they hand them off to husbands. The underfunctioner, on the other hand, is passive, relies on the other to know what to do and takes any advice, whether or not it is needed. Daughters of the bible would generally be thought of as underfunctioners, as their role is to do all that their

¹⁰ Carlfred B. Broderick, *Understanding Family Process: Basics of Family Systems Theory* (California: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 1993), 110.

¹¹ Robert M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New way of Thinking About The Individual and The Group* (Virginia: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 8-9.

father asks of them. Biblical daughters are passive characters who must rely on their fathers to determine their future, which is the foundation of the overfunctioner-underfunctioner relationship. When we think about the biblical daughter in this manner, it reinforces just how little power and opportunity for power she has.

Bowen's theory adds another layer to the father-daughter relationship of the bible through his discussion of fused and undifferentiated relationships. Bowen explains that when an individual is less independent, she enters into fused relationships where this individual cares more about the other than herself. "Lower level people are more fused into relationships. That is, they give up (lose) and take on (gain) more of self in relationships...While fusion solves togetherness "needs" – an innate push within the individual to unite with another – it is an effort to make a common self out of two and gives rise to anxiety. It is uncomfortable to give up part of oneself or, for that matter, take on part of someone else's. This discomfort is part of their ambient anxiety."¹² In the biblical family, the daughter can easily become an undifferentiated individual and the relationship with her father, a fused one. Bowen tells us that when fused family relationships occur between parents and children, it can lead to the child being overwhelmed.¹³ This means, that the more fused a daughter becomes in relationship with her father, the more the relationship will engulf her life and thus destroy her own individual identity. "The more one fuses into relationships, the more undifferentiated one is."¹⁴ Thus, it seems that a biblical daughter would be even more trapped inside the family sphere by a fused relationship with her father in a patriarchal system. We can infer

¹² Robert M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New way of Thinking About The Individual and The Group* (Virginia: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 30-31.

¹³ Ibid, 36-37.

¹⁴ Ibid, 33.

that it would be quite difficult for her to create an individual identity.

The frequency of important and highlighted biblical father-daughter relationships far outweighs that of mothers and daughters. Mothers seem to only reinforce the notion of biblical daughters as unimportant, because they contribute more to their sons' stories and lives. "Mothers play no role in the daughter stories, and they are never shown interceding in behalf of their daughters, as they are often seen to do in behalf of their sons."¹⁵ Mothers with daughters and sons, such as Leah and Jocheved, concern themselves a great deal more with their sons, knowing that it is their sons, not their daughters, who will gain power and determine the future of their people. In most cases, we know very little about the mothers of biblical daughters.

A daughter is only a transient member of her family, since she is only a part of her birth family until marriageable age. It seems difficult, if not impossible, for a daughter to make any real mark on a family story if there is no expectation that she will remain in that family after reaching puberty. "Ancient agrarian societies expected that a girl would leave her family soon after puberty and join her husband's household...As a result, a daughter was only a temporary member of her family, and would not be with her own parents at the peak of her strength and economic power. The temporary nature of a girl's daughterhood meant there could be no payback time for her and contributed to her vulnerability within the family."¹⁶

The temporary nature of a daughter's status as a family member must have made her connections to other family members tenuous. Some modern developmental theorists

¹⁵ Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 113.

¹⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 99.

argue that attachment (the emotional bonding between child and family which involves comfort, familiarity and trust) serves as the most important element in establishing a child's ability to create and sustain relationships throughout life. Being aware of the pattern of early marriage around her, one might speculate that a daughter might feel insecure, and may create, what developmental theorists call, a preoccupied and ambivalent attachment.¹⁷ This type of attachment would cause a daughter to feel even more vulnerable with her family and among the outside world. An insecure attachment would even reinforce the important biblical value that a daughter should not go outside of the domestic sphere, as she trades one dependent position in her father's home with that of a dependent position in her husband's home.

Not only are daughters the most vulnerable members of a patriarchal society, they are also the least visible characters represented in the bible. Daughters are not given much narrative space throughout the bible. The minimal discussion of them certainly seems to devalue daughters. Also, daughters are either nameless, or if named, we are never given the explanation for their names. "Annunciation scenes occur several times in the Bible before the birth of sons, but never before the birth of daughters."¹⁸ The less we know of daughters, the less we think of them and the less we recognize them as powerful or important characters in our people's text.

In response, I will discuss some of these nameless daughters in my thesis. Each unnamed daughter is referred to in the context of her relationship with her father, thus losing her own identity. Names are power, and to not have one or just to simply become

¹⁷ John W. Santrock, *Child Development*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2001), 470.

¹⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 112.

bat or *banot* X automatically reduces one's power. This is an issue that I have confronted in writing my thesis and while I cannot name these women appropriately, I believe that by telling their story I give them back a power that was lost. "Our task is to make the journey alongside the [unnamed woman]: to be her companion in a literary and hermeneutical enterprise."¹⁹

In the midst of what is often the silence and anonymity of biblical women, feminist scholars search for women's stories. Biblical feminist scholarship has gone about this in various ways, existing mainly on a continuum with two distinctly opposite poles. "The divide exists between those engaged in the text, even if highly critical or skeptical of it, and those who are not, either through indifference or outright rejection."²⁰ Those scholars who choose not to engage with the text work to more fully develop and even create women's stories outside of the text. Finding places where gaps exist, these feminist scholars innovate narratives through multiple artistic and scholarly venues. Many of these new texts are based on archeological evidence or a single line of biblical text. While there are pieces that fall into the category of narrative midrash and have some textual basis, there are also pieces that completely depart from the text and fabricate a narrative without any textual touchstone. Overall, this type of scholarship seeks to add to the already canonized biblical text and thus, add to our understanding of Judaism and the place of women within it. As Judith Plaskow states, "To expand Torah, we must reconstruct Jewish history to include the history of women, and in doing so alter the shape of Jewish

¹⁹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 66.

²⁰ Adriane B. Leveen, *Women Remaking American Judaism*, editor Riv-Ellen Prell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 84.

memory.”²¹

On the other end of the biblical feminist scholarship spectrum, are women who refuse to just reject or recreate the text. These scholars, like Phyllis Trible, choose to remain in the text and struggle with it. They reexamine the text with a magnifying glass and all the tools of biblical criticism. “Wary of charges of lack of evidence and of invention, these feminists rely on the rules and methods of biblical scholarship to carefully excavate and reconstruct the ancient biblical past of women”²² These feminist scholars recognize that while the patriarchal context of the bible will not change, women’s stories, however small or fractured, are within the text and need to be uncovered. Through their in-depth text study, they have uncovered many women’s narratives that had been previously ignored or unheard. “...through their efforts at scholarly recovery and excavation scholars have discovered layers of female experience and agency within the biblical text.”²³ Through their work, old stories have been renewed and we have new insights into the text.

It is my hope that this thesis adds another piece to this latter type of biblical feminist scholarship. Instead of trying to add new stories to our canon, we can use the daughters as a starting point to reexamine and rediscover the feminist stories that are already within the TaNaKh. “To study women in the Hebrew Bible is to reexamine and reassess a lengthy history of biblical hermeneutics; it is to pose new questions about legal and non-legal texts and to make what will strike some readers as radical suggestions

²¹ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From A Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 28.

²² Adriane B. Leveen, *Women Remaking American Judaism*, editor Riv-Ellen Prell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 83.

²³ Ibid, 88.

concerning the religion and culture of Israel.”²⁴ By challenging the text and rereading the stories of women, we can deepen our understanding of the texts we already have.

Furthermore, based on everything I have discussed, from the pervasiveness of the ancient patriarchal hierarchy to modern family theory with its depiction of the underfunctioning daughter, one might assume that biblical daughters could only be completely powerless and subservient to the men in their lives. We expect daughters of the bible to be nothing more than vulnerable victims. We assume that women’s stories, particularly those of daughters, are absent or that a patriarchal text from a patriarchal society could not possibly show women as powerful and far-reaching change agents. “Patriarchy is the biggest obstacle to recovering female voice since it either suppresses or marginalizes that voice.”²⁵ However, we are blinded by our bias. I have discovered daughters in the bible who are powerful, change-making forces. My readings will illustrate the overturning of expectations brought about by the limitations of patriarchy and by the assumptions of family systems theory. In so doing, we can obtain a broader understanding of the possibility of action by daughters within this patriarchal biblical society.

For instance, let us consider the case of Bat Pharaoh²⁶. Bat Pharaoh completely disobeys her father’s command and helps the children of Israel and their narrative to continue. *Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe in the river, and her maidens walked*

²⁴ Susan Niditch, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, editor Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998) 41.

²⁵ Adriane B. Leveen, *Women Remaking American Judaism*, editor Riv-Ellen Prell (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 85.

²⁶ I recognize that this name is not English, but transliterated Hebrew. Throughout the thesis, various daughters will be referred to in this manner. I will not be italicizing their names even though they are Hebrew names.

alongside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her handmaid to retrieve it...The child grew and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he was her son. She called him Moses, and she said, 'Since I drew him out of the water.' (Exodus 2:5,10) Her one defiant and powerful action makes the future possible and changes the course of the entire biblical story. Without Bat Pharaoh, Jewish history is over. By lifting one child out of a river, Bat Pharaoh defies her father's orders and contributes to an ongoing narrative. "...Pharaoh is tricked by his own daughter. The princess rescues and raises an 'illegal alien' right under her father's nose....Just as she drew out of the water a weak foundling despite her father's law, so Moses will eventually draw his people out of Pharaoh's bondage."²⁷ Here in Exodus, we are confronted by a daughter who is not vulnerable, not confined and not unnoticed. She is more than a vehicle for other characters to make change, but a change agent herself.

If we allow ourselves to read the stories of many biblical daughters like we have just reread that of Bat Pharaoh, then we can begin to think about the entire Bible in a new light. As Frymer-Kensky reminds us, "Biblical authors tell us about individual women and men precisely at the moment when their stories illuminate the social structure, political events, and cultural patterns of the day."²⁸ Thus their stories give us more than their voices. These stories give us new insights into the richly layered and multi-vocal experiences of many other women other than Bat Pharaoh within the biblical text. Many feminist biblical scholars who engage with the text conclude that women are mostly victims. However, if we concentrate on the highlighted moments of daughters' lives than

²⁷ Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 82.

²⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 334.

we can hold a more positive perspective on the female narratives of our text. There are ways to see these stories as ones of power and possibility even within their circumscribed sphere.

Bat Pharaoh is just one in a line of biblical daughters who show us that it is possible to turn limitedness into opportunity. Daughters of the bible struggle to gain power despite their lack of status, and while their success is varied and often complicated because they are ‘over looked’ and assumed to have little power, they have the possibility to make deep, surprising and unexpected societal change when they gain power. The challenges that they must overcome make their gains in power and their ability to make change even more profound and important. If daughters, the least likely group to gain power and make change in a patriarchal society are able to do just that, than clearly there is more room to maneuver in our seemingly patriarchal biblical text than we generally believe.

In this thesis, I will examine a spectrum of daughters who range from the completely powerless and victimized to the powerful and those with the ability to make change. In order to best illustrate the range of power and change making possibilities that daughters have, the daughters will be presented out of chronological order. By presenting the daughters on a spectrum, rather than in chronological order, I hope to illuminate the ways in which daughters gain and lose power, as well as the various ways in which they can utilize their power.

To begin, I will demonstrate that gaining a voice is the first and most important step in a daughter’s obtainment of power. The daughters of the next chapter - Dinah, Tamar and Michal - will also teach us that not all power is sustainable. These three daughters navigate within a patriarchal structure, managing to make the men in their lives look

foolish, selfish or both. Yet they are also a reminder that even when daughters are able to find and use their voice, they cannot always change their situation.

The daughters of the chapter that follows, Bat Jephthah, Banot Lot and Banot Zelophehad, also gain power. However, unlike their counterparts in chapter two, these daughters are able to utilize their power, in both the private and public spheres. Each of these daughters confronts issues of legacy and exercise agency to change their fate, making their relationships with their fathers' extremely complex and important. These daughters remind us how important the father-daughter relationship is, as they rewrite the dynamics of the relationship. Like Bat Pharaoh, these revisionist daughters find ways to utilize their power and change the narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

POWERLESS: MOVING FROM SILENCE TO VOICE

The most obvious, and in some ways the simplest, form of power is the voice. Being able to communicate our desires and our needs is what separates us from animals. Our voices are what present us as rationale and intelligent beings. When someone is silenced, she is pushed aside and seen as less than a person.

In many patriarchal societies, women are denied a voice outside of the private sphere. However, there are instances of women in the bible who do have a voice in the private sphere. It is remarkable to encounter these moments when the most disenfranchised of women, the daughters, struggle and succeed in gaining a voice.

The daughters of this chapter are on a continuum from silent daughter to vocal daughter. Dinah never says anything. She takes only one self-determined action, but she is not given any dialogue in our text. Tamar manages to find her voice in the most terrifying of situations, but she is unable to change her fate. Michal, the last of the three, uses her voice in many instances but the mysterious end to her story allows us to question the impact she is able to make with her words. These daughters help us to see that, even if limited, power is possible for daughters to grasp and use, but unfortunately, in the cases of these women that power is short lived.

DINAH – Depiction of a Powerless Daughter

Our look into daughters of the bible and their struggle for power must begin with the most famous of daughters. Dinah is probably one of the most well-known female characters in the entire TaNaKh in our contemporary time, particularly because of Anita

Diamant's The Red Tent.²⁹ While Diamant rewrites Dinah's story, giving her power and control over her own life, in actuality Dinah is the antithesis of powerful.

Dinah's story begins with a miniscule amount of power. The text tells us that she goes out, rather than that someone took her out. Nor was she sent out. Dinah is mentioned within the context of her family, but acting on her own volition. "*Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.*" (Genesis 34:1) No one goes with Dinah and there is no indication that anyone helps Dinah to make this decision. "She is acting on her own initiative, reaching beyond the family, opening the gates to a relationship that goes beyond the confines of her home. She has made a choice: she will go to meet the daughters of the land."³⁰ In her going out, Dinah leaves the confines of the family, the only place seen as proper and safe for the helpless and disempowered daughter. Dinah shows us in this one verse, that a daughter has the possibility to act according to her own mind.

After this one decision however, Dinah becomes completely powerless. She makes no more decisions, nor does she commit any more actions. Actions happen to her. People act on her behalf, but without ever taking her into account. She becomes merely a vehicle to move the narrative along. "The story is commonly called 'The Rape of Dinah.' But the story is not really about Dinah, who never speaks and essentially disappears from the narrative after the third verse."³¹ Even Dinah's rape becomes a cautionary tale, and not a part of her actual story. The narrative moves beyond the personal and serves as a warning to young daughters everywhere: Go out in to town, leave the safe control of your

²⁹ Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent* (New York: Picador USA, 1997).

³⁰ Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 180.

³¹ Ibid, 181.

family and bad things will happen to you. Dinah's choice to leave the family tent evolves from a story of a woman's ability to make her own choices to a tale of xenophobia and violence.

The act of rape occurs, and contrary to our modern sensibilities, the narrator tells us all about the emotions of the rapist, Shechem and eventually those of Jacob's sons. Dinah is nothing more than a reference point for her father, brothers and rapist. No one worries that she has been at all affected by the rape. Instead her brothers and her rapist care more about their own needs and honor. "[T]he story is disturbing to us because we do not know what Dinah's feelings were concerning all the events in the story and what became of her."³² They strategize, each hoping to turn the situation in their favor. Dinah is not a concern in their bartering, merely the motive for making their argument. Her rapist, Shechem, hopes to find a solution that will bring prosperity and make Dinah his wife. Her brothers seek a violent revenge not necessarily on behalf of their sister specifically, but because "*he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter.*"(Genesis 34:7) It is the general crime against all of Israel, and especially against Jacob and his sons, that Dinah's brothers truly care about. Her rape and victimization are nothing in comparison with their impugned honor and that of Israel.

In verse 26, Dinah is "taken out" of Shechem's house by her brothers, most likely relegated to living out her days as a shunned woman in her family's home. This is in stark contrast to verse 1 where she "went out". If we were not sure before this moment, now we know that Dinah is powerless. She cannot go anywhere on her own. She does not go. She is taken. Like her rape, this is yet another display of power and force used against

³² Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 77.

her. The mention of her in this late verse emphasizes Dinah's silence throughout this episode. She is powerless in all that happens to her and we get a sense that she may never be heard from or seen again.

Dinah's only moment of power and control comes at the very beginning of this story, when she decides to go out and visit "the daughters of the land." It is important to emphasize that after this Dinah has no power, particularly in light of the many modern commentaries that have claimed that Dinah maintains her power during the sexual interaction with Shechem. Dinah goes from a moment of control over her own fate to total silence. Without any kind of voice, any way to express herself, Dinah's status is that of complete powerlessness. She cannot be a survivor of rape in her powerless state. She will only ever be a victim.

Some attempt to argue that Dinah was not raped, but rather she consented to sexual intercourse. However, there can be no debate that Dinah was in fact raped. The second verb used to describe the sexual interaction between Shechem and Dinah in verse two, *va'y'ahneha*, refers to force. As Dr. David Sperling explains, "...it misses the point to translate simply 'had sexual relations.' It is rather the exercise of sexual dominance in the inappropriate settings of menstruation and adultery."³³ This verb is used throughout the Bible in the context of objectifying or violating a woman. In fact, this same verb is used multiple times throughout the interaction between Tamar and Amnon and to describe the act of rape in 2Samuel 13; an act we do not debate as being rape because Tamar used her voice to speak out against it.

³³ S. David Sperling, *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment*, ed Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, Michael J. Williams (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, Inc., 2009).

Meir Sternberg, one of the leading scholarly authorities on Dinah's tale, states that the rhetoric's order and structure precludes any option other than rape. Sternberg reminds us that without any buffer explaining Shechem's actions, the narrator seeks to emphasize how sudden and shocking are his actions.³⁴ The language here is also unbalanced, reminding us that only Shechem, not Dinah, has power. Thus, Dinah has no choice and this is truly an act of force.

In many ways, Dinah's tale disproves my thesis that daughters of the bible can and do gain power. She is the type that most think about when they reflect on women in the bible – voiceless, powerless, and victimized. Dinah's tale attempts to teach us that remaining within the family is the only way for a daughter to remain safe. From her cautionary tale, we learn that daughters should not be seen nor heard. Dinah presents to us a picture of a daughter who cannot save herself and no matter how she tries, is unable to move outside her small family circle. She certainly represents the powerless end of the spectrum in spite of her one independent action. Dinah is only one type of biblical daughter and she is certainly not the rule.

TAMAR: A Voice That Effects No Change

Tamar, like Dinah, is the daughter of an important biblical character. Tamar is one of the children of King David. she spends her life surrounded by male relatives, also similar to Dinah. Unlike Dinah, however, Tamar is raped by her own brother and her other male relatives are slow to act. The threat now lies within the family, not outside of it. In Tamar's story, there is no immediate honor killing. What makes Tamar quite

³⁴ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 446-447.

distinct from Dinah is the way in which she uses her voice and struggles to become a powerful force in a situation where, like Dinah, she might have been no more than a silent victim.

As 2 Samuel 13 begins, the reader finds out about three of King David's children, one of whom lusts for another. Amnon is obsessed with his half-sister, Tamar. It has consumed his thoughts and desires. With the help of his conniving friend, Amnon devises a plan to be alone with his sister. Amnon has David, king and father to both siblings, send Tamar to him to cook for him under the false pretense of illness. As an obedient daughter and sister, Tamar obliges and goes. Unlike Dinah, it is not her choice to go out into the world, and Tamar's threat comes from within her own family. Tamar takes painstaking care in cooking and caring for her supposedly sick brother. The Tamar we meet in this early part of the story is the ultimate good girl, doing everything that is asked of her. But that will all change. Some requests are too heinous even for obedient Tamar.

Amnon sends everyone else out of the room and Tamar, who has done nothing but obey the commands of the men in her life, is left with her to-be attacker. Amnon states his intentions, attempting to cajole Tamar into sleeping with him. It is clear to the reader through these verses that Tamar is more than just a victim. As she gains a voice, unlike Dinah, she becomes a survivor. She is not flustered by her brother's indecent proposal, nor does she scream or run as one would expect. Tamar's voice here gives her power, and reduces some of Amnon's. Instead of focusing on Amnon and his disgusting desire, we focus on Tamar and the way she tries to change her situation.

Tamar delays the rape itself by articulately arguing with Amnon. She manages to slow down the narrative, with thoughtful and comprehensive sentences. This acts as a

balance to Amnon's caveman-like one word commands. She argues for herself and her interests. She stressed how wrong it would be for them to be sexually intimate, using words like "no" and "don't" multiple times. Her sentences are not terse, but rather poetic and articulate statements. "*But she said to him, 'Don't, brother. Don't force me. Such things are not done in Israel. Don't do such a vile thing.'*" (2 Samuel 13:12) Her well-stated argument serves not only to make her powerful, but shows the reader just how rash and illogical Amnon is behaving. "In the presence of a rapist, Tamar panics not. In fact, she claims her voice. Tamar's speech to Amnon is rationale and reasonable. She does not yell or scream. Unlike Amnon's brisk commands, her deliberations slow the movement of the plot, though they are unable to divert it."³⁵ Tamar's eloquent sentences show her as the intelligent sibling. The quality of her statements show Amnon as boorish and impulsive. While Tamar's words are insightful, Amnon sees no farther into the future than the pressing needs of his libido.

Tamar stands up for herself, and while she is unable to change Amnon's mind, she does manage to look powerful and reasonable, unlike her brother. Amnon may not have heard her voice, but we certainly have. We recognize Tamar's power, even with its limitations. In fact, she is offering a statement of the way things should or should not be done in Israel. Unlike Dinah, whose rape illustrates the necessity of young girls remaining at home, Tamar's rape becomes an example of the larger deterioration of values, even within the home.

Despite Tamar's display of a powerful, articulate and well-spoken female character, the rape still occurs. Just as Tamar seems to be able to do just about anything,

³⁵ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 45.

the author reminds us that this is not so. She lives in a patriarchal society and women are limited in what they can control and change. Tamar's powerful moment is just that – a fleeting moment. She cannot retain the power she gained by speaking against Amnon. Phyllis Tribble argues that we are aware of the limits of Tamar's power before the rape. "Precisely now, when Tamar speaks for the first time, the narrator hints at her powerlessness by avoiding her name...the name Tamar never prefaces her speeches here or later...only the pronoun *she*...[suggesting] the plight of the female. Without her name, she lacks power."³⁶ The fact that Tamar's name is used so little throughout the entire passage reminds us that Tamar will never gain the same status as her named brothers.

The removal of Tamar's power is emphasized as the author shifts the reader's attention from victim to abuser. Here, in the midst of Tamar's story, we focus entirely on Amnon. Verses 14 and 15 tell us about Amnon's actions and his shift from feeling lust to feeling loathing. The narrator leaves out Tamar's actions, words and feelings, revealing only Amnon's. It is through her silence in these verses, not only her rape, that Tamar is completely victimized, objectified and powerless. No matter what Tamar does with her little and limited power, she is ultimately stuck as a weaker player in a patriarchal society.

Verses 16 and 17 of 2 Samuel 13 work with verses 11 through 13, to bookend the rape within Tamar's voice. While Tamar is silent during the rape, before and afterwards, she speaks out and attempts to change her situation. Here again, Tamar is eloquent and aware, trying to convince her brother and rapist that she has a great worth and deserves to be treated as such. It is certainly a show of Tamar's inner strength and power that she is

³⁶ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 46.

not paralyzed by the violence and violation that has just been done to her. Tamar stands firm, demanding her needs and rights be accounted for. “This abused woman will no more heed Amnon’s order of dismissal than she consented to his demand of rape. Nor does she allow anger to cloud her vision. If before the deed she sought justice, how much more after it!”³⁷

Despite Tamar’s pleading, Amnon is disgusted by the sight of her and sends her away. Once again, her words fall on deaf ears and an unchangeable mind. He degrades her even more by not using any noun to refer to her. Amnon asks his servant to remove just *zot*, meaning “this,” “it,” or “this thing.” It is the servant who throws Tamar, the king’s daughter, out of the room and locks the door behind her. Tamar is left outside of the comfort of a home. She has moved from the private, female domain to the harsh, public world that is the male domain.

Amnon has refused to listen to her voice, so Tamar’s only option is to hope that others will hear her outcry and help her. Despite the fact that Tamar again is unable to alter the course of Amnon’s actions, she refuses to sit idly by. She will not merely accept what has been done to her. If she cannot make Amnon heed her, Tamar chooses to make the entire kingdom hear her.

However, Tamar’s last stand differs from the appeals she made to her brother and victimizer, Amnon. Here Tamar uses no words, she simply screams. Having felt her words useless, Tamar sees fit to use the power of her voice the only other way she knows how. She is no longer an articulate, well-reasoned woman. Instead, she simply wails and uses a specific visual reference. Tamar rips her *k’tonet passim*, ornamented tunic, the

³⁷ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 47.

same piece of clothing that Joseph loved. In Joseph's story, his brothers used the *k'tonet passim* to fake his death. In this case, we are told by the narrator that the tunic was worn by virginal daughters of the king. Tamar uses her clothing to show that she is no longer a virgin. Tamar, knowing that her words have failed her in the past, chooses symbols to make a public statement that she has been raped.

Tamar's public outcry attracts attention from only one person though, her other brother Absalom. The third child of David that we meet in this narrative, Absalom is the full brother of Tamar, but is not David's favorite. We hope that Absalom will be the male relative to come to Tamar's aide and defense, but that is not what happens.

Absalom takes away Tamar's power just as Amnon did. Absalom removes the little power that Tamar has managed to rummage up for herself. Absalom entreats Tamar to stay silent, the one thing she has not been during this ordeal. He takes her into his home to live out her life as a desolate woman. He stifles her outcry and ends her story. "Absalom does not recognize the enormity of the offense against Tamar, and minimizes what has happened. Amnon, he says, has **'been with you.'** By not naming the offense as rape, he belittles Tamar's pain, denies her outrage and compounds her tragedy."³⁸ Tamar's agency is taken from her for the last time. Tamar began in silent obedience, doing what was asked by a male relative, and will end her story the same way. We do not hear from her again. Tamar has been stripped of the little power she had and used, as she is tucked away, voiceless and no longer an agent of her own destiny.

Absalom does eventually kill his sister's rapist. But it is Amnon's death, rather than Tamar's rape, that makes a greater impact on the political climate, leading to a civil

³⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 167.

war. We are not even reminded that Absalom is angry at Amnon for raping their sister when he kills Amnon.

If Tamar is surrounded by, and must constantly answer to, men, then it makes her struggle for power even more substantial and moving. Tamar evolves from being the good girl who does what she is told, to an articulate woman capable of standing up for herself. She goes beyond what is expected of her, utilizing all her skills in an attempt to change her fate. No matter what is thrown her way, Tamar is not silent, nor does she panic, despite the horrific violence and violation she experiences.

In fact, Tamar herself is her only advocate. We have seen that one brother victimizes her and the other silences her. Her father, the man who has the ultimate responsibility for and to her, does nothing upon hearing the news. Yes, we are told that David is “greatly upset,” but we do not know why and he says nothing to chastise Amnon’s or his actions. Tamar’s is the only voice that states the crime against her and cries out against it, both publicly and privately.

Tamar moves between powerful and powerless, as she uses all the skills and resources around her. She is not silent in the wake or shadow of her rape. She does not lay down and accept her terrible fate. She attempts to turn the public domain into a woman’s domain. She takes actions in an attempt to ensure that her place in society is not damaged and that her needs are dealt with. Yet, the most devastating part of Tamar’s story is not her rape. The truly distressing thing is that despite all Tamar’s attempts, she is unable to gain any real power and change the outcome of her situation. Even with her articulate speeches, her loud moaning, her public outcry, Tamar’s story ends with her silent and hopeless in another brother’s home. In the case of Tamar, it seems that women

can gain small amounts of power, but are unable to sustain that momentum and affect change within the text. However, Tamar's story, unlike Dinah's, has a redemptive value outside of the text as she stirs outrage in her readers. It causes us to question the treatment and safety of women in the private, not just the public, sphere.

MICHAL: A Voice That Defies Patriarchy

Tamar is not the only woman who struggles to gain power through voice. Michal, the daughter of King Saul and wife of King David, also speaks out. Michal calls into question whether a woman's voice is powerful enough to make change. Michal also pushes us to think about where women fit into the public domain just as Tamar did. As a princess and wife of a king, Michal leads a much more public life than many other women in the bible, surrounded by power. And while Michal is often tossed between her rival husband and father as they fight for status and power, she manages to grab some of that power and use it as she sees fit.

We are introduced to Michal in 1 Samuel 18. Michal is the second daughter of Saul offered to David in a plot to kill him. Saul discovers that Michal is in love with David and believes that this love will help him to fend off this particular rival. But Michal's love is more important than Saul realizes. Michal is the **only woman** in the TaNaKh who expresses this intense emotion.³⁹ If the emotion of love is usually one that only men get to express in the bible, then Michal's expression gives her a great sense of importance. Michal is not a disempowered woman. She has emotions that the audience can understand and that bring her to the forefront of the story. Michal is the only character in this moment whose private world is shared with the reader, thus making the

³⁹ Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 115.

reader realize how crucial a character she is and will be. It is not David, the soon-to-be great king of Israel that is given any emotion in this episode. If this one woman gets to have an emotion that no other woman does, she must be special and she must play a very important role in our text.

What is also interesting about the statements about Michal's love for David is the way they show us the relationship between the two men in her life. The contrast of David and Saul is reinforced both times that Michal's love for David is expressed since she is referred to as Saul's daughter in verses 20 and 28. By noting her familial relationship, it emphasizes her choice, in the beginning of her story, of David over Saul, her father.

However, Michal's love is not a private emotion. Her feelings for David get used by her father in the public sphere. Saul decides to use Michal's love against David in an attempt to cause David's death in a dangerous scenario. Saul takes the power that Michal has gained through expressing and owning her emotions and uses it for his own means. Michal's love becomes nothing more than a tool for someone else, rather than for herself.

While Michal's love is corrupted and used for Saul's advantage, she is able to take back the power that her emotions have given her. In 1 Samuel 19, Michal gets back at her father for using her love in an attempt to kill the man she loves. Michal's wits and knowledge of her father help her to realize that once again, her father is trying to kill her husband. Michal once again chooses the man she loves over her father, and helps David to flee. "Using deception and wit, Michal helps David escape from her father, Saul. Thus she chooses between father and husband."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 127.

It is her plan, her idea that saves David. Without her convincing David to go out the window and tricking the guards with what looked like a body in the bed, David might not have been able to escape. Without her escape plan and help, David might never have become the great king of Israel. In these few verses, Michal's power and ability to control a situation are established. "*Michal let David down from the window and he escaped and fled. Michal then took the household idol, laid it on the bed, and covered it with a cloth; and at its head she put a net of goat's hair.*" (1 Samuel 19:12-13) In the second verse quoted here, Michal is the subject of each of the active verbs. It is clear that she is the character with a plan and with the power to move the narrative forward. However, just as Dinah and Tamar before her, Michal will have difficulty sustaining that power.

When Saul asks Michal what she has done, she loses a bit of her gusto. Saul uncovers each element of Michal's cover-up and strips away each layer of her power with it. She slowly reemerges as the good daughter. Not wanting to displease her father (and maybe realizing that she has been left behind by the man she loved enough to help escape the king), Michal tells Saul that the escape was all David's idea and she had no choice but to go along with it. In this lie, Michal's power seems to slip away just as easily as David slipped out the window. Michal does not stand up to her father and tell him the truth. She does not call him out on all the ways he has used her, used her emotions for his own ends. She does not declare to her father that she can devise plans and follow through with them, just like any man. Instead Michal takes no responsibility for David's escape and she is abruptly silenced in the text.

Others might argue that Michal's response to her father shows her as a cunning survivor, capable of convincing the king of her loyalty while still keeping her husband,

and herself, alive. It is certainly possible to interpret the text this way. We know that later Michal will be courageous and have an example of her powerful voice re-emerging when she stands up to David. It seems however, that in this instance, Michal is more worried about what she has to lose and she does not come across as strong-willed. Her short answer to her father seems too simplistic to be powerful in any way.

Her own power diminished, Michal is back to her lowly position as a daughter who can be used to give power and status to her father. 1 Samuel 25:44 tells us that Michal has been handed over to another man by her father. Palti son of Laish from Gallim is now Michal's husband. While this marriage certainly asserts Saul's power as father over his daughter, it is much less dramatic than Michal's marriage to David. We know nothing about the couples' emotions. In one verse, Michal's status as a princess and powerful daughter is gone. She is now just another woman mentioned in the TaNaKh.

Michal is married off to another man and we do not hear from her again until David draws her back into the narrative in 2 Samuel 3:13-16. Michal exits and returns to the narrative through the command of the king, a male relative to her. "Once a rebel who helps her husband survive, Michal quickly becomes a pawn whose fate is determined by her father and her husband. To her father, Michal was a snare to entrap David; to David, she is a political convenience."⁴¹ We are reminded whatever power Michal might have gained through her strong emotions and her cunning in planning David's quick escape is lost. During the entire episode of Michal being brought back into the narrative, she is silent. We know her new husband, Palti, weeps, but the audience is told nothing of what Michal feels, says or does. *Ish-bosheth sent and had [Michal] taken away from [her]*

⁴¹ Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, *After the Apple* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005), 138-139.

husband, away from Paltiel son of Laish. Her husband walked with her and cried after her until Bahurim. Then Abner ordered him to turn back, and he turned back. (2Samuel 3:15-16) “Then David demands Michal back. Her new husband is very upset, but Michal’s feelings are not stated.”⁴² Her powerlessness is amplified by this silence.

However, Michal’s silence is short lived. She finds her voice again when she watches her husband out a window, as he shouts and dances before God, which we read in 2 Samuel 6:16. Michal is back in the window reliving the experience of her beloved fleeing from her and leaving her behind. The window reminds Michal, as well as the audience, of the separation between Michal and David, and between the Michal we knew in 1 Samuel and the Michal we know now. This time, Michal will not be left to watch. This time, Michal will act and cross the threshold, moving from behind the window to confront David.

Michal speaks to her husband, but her epithet here is not “wife of David,” rather she is again “daughter of Saul.” We are reminded of her status and power as a princess and shown through these words that she has finally chosen her father over her husband. Michal has realized not only where her loyalties truly lie, but her own power and place. She has truly found her voice, and so she uses it to speak out against her husband, the great King David.

In 6:20, Michal states her disgust with David’s behavior. In this one verse, she calls him names and states that he is a smug womanizer. She will no longer be silent in his presence and complacently accept his kingship. Michal will not be overpowered by a man she now despises. *David went home to greet his household. And Michal daughter of*

⁴² Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 127.

Saul came out to meet David and said, “Didn’t the king of Israel do himself honor today – exposing himself today in the sight of the slavegirls of his subjects, as one of the riffraffs might expose himself!” (2 Samuel 6:20) Michal makes this statement not inside the house, not in a private or female domain, but outside in public. “Other biblical women are as outspoken as Michal. Neither Sarah nor Rachel hold back their anger and frustration, but they give vent to their feelings privately.”⁴³ She goes out to David and declares openly her revulsion with his behavior and his kingship. Like Tamar does later in this book, Michal chooses to make a public declaration against a powerful man, thus taking his power for herself. Yet, unlike Tamar, her public declaration is her most powerful moment and not a wordless one. She is not confined and silent in the woman’s domain. She is out in public. She is loud and she is powerful.

Unlike Tamar, Michal is careful in her words. Tamar simply cried out with no real shape to her message. Michal chooses to cut down David publicly by being impersonal and using intense, angry language. “One should also note here that Michal speaks to her husband in the third person, not deferentially but angrily, and refers to him by public title, not in any personal relation to her.”⁴⁴ Through her words, Michal seems to not only gain power, but break the power that David holds over her. She is no longer defined or restricted by her love of, or marriage to, David. Michal will exit the narrative as she entered it, defined only by her natural born status: Daughter of Saul.

Michal, however, does not have the last word. David answers her words by reminding her that he is the king that God has chosen. He is not demeaned by her. He

⁴³ Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, *After the Apple* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005), 146.

⁴⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 229.

does not seem to care about the power she has found. He is not threatened. Michal's power is limited by its inability to affect change in David.

The final line of Michal's story leaves us with many questions however. 2 Samuel 6:23 reads: *And Michal daughter of Saul had no child till her dying day.*⁴⁵ We are left to wonder what this means. Is Michal being punished for powerfully speaking out? Or has Michal taken a stand and refused to let David in her bed, thus maintaining her power in a very private but intense way? "The whole story of David and Michal concludes on a poised ambiguity through the suppression of casual explanation: Is this a punishment from God, or simply a refusal by David to share her bed, or is the latter to be understood as the agency for the former?"⁴⁶ There is an alternate explanation. It seems most likely, in the context of this argument, that while Michal's power is diminished, it still exists in the private realm. She is unable to affect David in public, but she can refuse him and stand up for herself in the bedroom.

While Michal's power comes in short spurts, it is more substantial than that of Tamar or Dinah. Michal is able to achieve things that the other two women were not. Michal stands up to the men in her life and does make choices for herself, despite the best efforts of kings to control her. Her public declarations are more than anguished cries. She has not just a voice, but words. Even more significantly, Michal appears more than once. She is present in multiple chapters and each time makes a profound impact on the narrative, even allowing it, and David's very life, to continue by her first rebellion.

⁴⁵ Translated by: Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 230.

⁴⁶ Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 230.

It cannot be denied that Michal is a daughter with tremendous power. However, Michal's power cannot be sustained throughout her life and is limited. While her power often exists in the political realm, she is unable to affect any kind of change with it. Political power is the highest form of power, and it is incredible that women can achieve it. But Michal, as we will see in the next chapter, is not the only woman to gain this type of power. Michal is merely one step on the way to woman gaining and sustaining power, and using it to make change.

This chapter has shown us daughters struggling to gain voice. Dinah is on one end of the spectrum, completely silent and unable to build up any power with which she can change her situation. Both Tamar and Michal move away from Dinah, as they do not stay silent. However, while Tamar's words are unable to provide her with power to change her situation, we, the reader, recognize the wrong being done to her and see her as an incredibly brave and articulate woman. Michal, on the other hand, is able to change not only her own situation, but her voice has the power to alter the course of the narrative. She saves David's life from her father. At the same time she's unafraid to tell off her husband, the king, later on in her story, possibly choosing to end their marital relations. But Michal's power is only episodic. Her strong voice does not give her enough power to make her destiny her own. These daughters, however, pave the way for our next set of daughters, those who are truly able to maintain power and make change on a much grander scale.

CHAPTER THREE: **THE REVISIONIST DAUGHTERS**

The father-daughter relationship is central to the life of a biblical daughter. Fathers are constantly concerned with issues of legacy, and their daughters are just one more way to ensure the continuation of their line. In biblical society, legacy is equivalent to immortality. Each of the daughters of this chapter, Bat Jephthah, Banot Lot and Banot Zelophehad, deal with issues surrounding their father's legacy. In this chapter we see, "...the powerlessness of progeny becomes the power of progeny to determine the future."⁴⁷

As I noted, the daughters of chapter two are able to gain power and voice, however fleeting. Yet, since they are unable to affect their own situation, their power is questionable. The daughters of this chapter are able to sustain their power for longer and use it to make important changes. In fact, in this chapter I will argue that the daughters of the bible are capable of not only changing their own situation, but of making ripples of change throughout the entire Israelite society. In some instances, their power affects the course of biblical history. For these revisionist daughters, power is not just private but public.

Unlike the daughters of chapter two, these daughters do not represent a spectrum of power but show us different ways that daughters of the bible were powerful and affected change. Bat Jephthah serves as a reminder that even when our own fate cannot be altered, that does not mean we are powerless. No matter what, we always have the option to assert agency and do things on our own terms. Banot Lot present the possibility of

⁴⁷ Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters: Sex, Redemption and Women's Quest for Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 11.

sexual power and sexual role reversal. While they may begin their tale as powerless as Dinah, they end their narrative by giving birth to two nations and preserving their father's line. Lastly, we will examine the power of Banot Zelophehad. Their power is solely in the public realm and shows that strong women can affect the laws of an entire society.

BAT JEPHTHEH - On Her Terms

The first daughter of this chapter is one who helps us to transition from women who struggle merely to gain power through their voice to women who have power and make major changes, even if their speech is limited. Bat Jephthah finds her voice when, like Tamar and Michal, she has already become a victim. In fact, her powerful words do not change the outcome of her story. Certainly, she may seem like yet another victim with a voice, but Bat Jephthah does something different than the daughters of chapter two. Bat Jephthah is able to reframe her narrative in her own terms. More importantly, the realm of her power goes beyond her own narrative. Because she takes agency, she calls into question a societal norm and forces the Israelite people to question the custom of vows. In addition, her story initiates a custom that lasts beyond her own life.

Bat Jephthah's story begins before we even meet her. Jephthah is an outcast, brought back into the family fold in order to help win a war. He is a man concerned with his name and his legacy, so much so that he makes a vow to God that he will offer a sacrifice in exchange for victory over the Ammonites. *And Jephthah made the following vow to the God: 'If you deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the one that comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be for God and I will offer it as a burnt offering.* (Judges 11:30-31) Jephthah most likely

imagined that a servant or an animal would be the first out of the house. A man clearly concerned about legacy could not have dreamed that his only child would be the one to come out to greet him. Our narrator is creating a scenario that calls into question not only sacrifice, but also the practice of making vows by making the readers uneasy with all the possible outcomes that lie ahead.

We feel the sense of foreboding in this verse, and, in fact, just three verses later, Bat Jephthah comes rushing out of the house to greet her father and celebrate his victorious homecoming. Her fate has already been sealed. Her father has made a vow that cannot be broken and she will be put to death. She will be sacrificed to the Divine in thanks for her father's victory. The reader and all the players seem to know this horrible end is inevitable, causing us to wish Jephthah had made a very different promise to God. This twist, while almost obvious, feels a bit exaggerated and we come to realize how much the narrator dislikes the custom of making vows. Rather than presenting a simple story that shows vows as problematic, our storyteller creates the worst possible scenario.

Yet, this is not the end of Bat Jephthah's story. The next verse does not tell us how Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to God. Rather it draws the reader in deeper as the narrative becomes more complex. After emphasizing the fact that this is Jephthah's only child in the second half of verse 34, Jephthah becomes distraught and hysterical. He is not angry at himself for making such a thoughtless vow, but at his daughter. He tells her, *You have brought me low; you have become my troubler.* (Judges 11:35) "At the height of his power, Jephthah comes home. And then is defeated by his daughter's alacrity and

his own stupid vow.”⁴⁸ Jephthah, the warrior who just a few verses earlier led the Israelites to victory, is now an angry and grieving father who blames his daughter, his victim.

However, while her father is irrational with misplaced anger, Bat Jephthah speaks articulately and with an incredible inner courage. *“She said to him, “My father, you have uttered a vow, seeing that the God has vindicated you against your enemies, the Ammonites.” She further said to her father, “Let this be done for me: let me be for two months, and I will go with my companions and lament upon the hills and there bewail my maidenhood.”* (Judges 11:36-37) This is reminiscent of Tamar’s speeches to Amnon. Neither one changes the outcome, but both gain power and lessen our respect for their male counterparts. Yet, Bat Jephthah is able to convince her father to alter, by delaying, his plan of sacrifice slightly, giving her an opportunity to express emotions with her peers. Without it being told to her, Bat Jephthah knows what vow her father has uttered and she recognizes that because it is a vow, it must be kept. She entreats her father to do just that. It is in this moment, that she not only accepts her fate, but takes control of her situation. She tells her father that before he keeps his vow, she wants the opportunity to go to the hills with other young women and mourn her situation. “Nevertheless, hers is not a quiet acquiescence. Within the limits of the inevitable she takes charge to bargain for herself. The victim assumes responsibility, not for blame but for integrity.”⁴⁹

Bat Jephthah is not just being obedient to her father or to God here. In fact, Bat Jephthah is accepting the societal norms and recognizing that this is the way of the world.

⁴⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 107.

⁴⁹ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 103.

She recognizes that there are certain things she can change, and things she cannot. Bat Jephthah chooses to fight a battle she can win, asking for time and a chance at relationships, instead of battling against the vow being fulfilled. She does not try to change things that seem beyond her control, nor does the narrator want her to do that. By returning to her father, Bat Jephthah's story critiques the unnecessary use and danger of vows. "The story...[shows] what negative consequences [vows] have when taken to their extreme...here, with Jephthah, it led to child sacrifice."⁵⁰ In returning, we understand that Bat Jephthah had no choice but allow her father to carry out his vow. No matter how much power Bat Jephthah gains, she must submit to this societal norm. We realize that vows have authority and can easily turn dangerous and fatal.

In the hills, Bat Jephthah mourns more than her virginity. She is mourning for the loss of a future. She will never be a mother and wife. She will never live life to the fullest and continue her legacy. "The emphasis on what she was missing lies not with what she could have created but those aspects of life that she would never have a chance to experience."⁵¹ This is the theme that began earlier on in Jephthah's story. We know him to be a character who is very concerned with legacy and lineage, as he was kicked out of his family because his mother was a prostitute and not the true wife of his father.

Jephthah the Gileadite was an able warrior, who was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah's father was Gilead; but Gilead also had sons by his wife, and when the wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out. They said to him, "You shall have no share in our father's property, for you are the son of an outsider." (Judges 11:1-2) Jephthah spends the rest of

⁵⁰ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 186.

⁵¹ Ibid, 181.

his life trying to become a legitimate member of his own family. The narrator is sure to point out to us that Bat Jephthah is Jephthah's only child, emphasizing the focus on lineage and family. By sacrificing his own daughter, Jephthah will not only be ending his daughter's chance at a legacy, but also his own. "This singularity, this 'sole-ness,' deepens the father's dilemma. If he sacrifices her, he will have no descendants, and his name will die. Biblical Israel considered the extirpation of a lineage, which it called *karet*, the worst fate that could befall anyone."⁵²

Bat Jephthah's time in the hills is also a transition. "The essential idea is that [Bat Jephthah] must go away, away from her father's house, and away from the rule of society. She is leaving her father's house: when she returns, she will belong to another world..."⁵³ We are not given much information about what happens while Bat Jephthah goes into the hills with other young women, but we do know that it is the last thing she does by choice. By going up into the hills, Bat Jephthah leaves society on her own terms and makes her own exit. Just as Dinah made the choice to go out into the world, so too Bat Jephthah makes the same decision. She also returns on her own terms. *She and her companions went and bewailed her maidenhood upon the hills. After two months' time, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed.* (Judges 11:38b-39) What's more is that her time in the hills becomes the essential focus of the end of the chapter. The text is less concerned with her sacrificial death and more intrigued by the ritual that she created. *So it became a custom in Israel for the maidens of Israel to go every year, for four days in the year and chant dirges for the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.* (Judges

⁵² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 108.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 111.

11:39b-40) This is how the narrative of Bat Jephthah actually ends, with her being always remembered.

Bat Jephthah is sacrificed by her father in the end, and most would argue that this proves she is completely powerless. If her situation does not change, and she is still a victim in the end, how is that Bat Jephthah is a powerful daughter? Bat Jephthah is not powerful because she is sacrificed. She is powerful because she does not merely let herself be sacrificed. She reframes her situation, deciding how and when her fate will occur. This is a daughter who recognizes and reminds us that not all fates can be changed, yet all can be shaped through a sense of agency. “Within the limits of the inevitable she has shaped meaning for herself.”⁵⁴ By maintaining a sense of self and taking her fate into her own hands, Bat Jephthah becomes an extremely powerful daughter.

Bat Jephthah’s sacrificial death actually increases her power. Since her fate was because of a vow, her fate calls all vows into question. Bat Jephthah’s story becomes a tool used by commentators and scholars throughout Jewish history when trying to caution people against making, and even ending the use of vows. “The sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter is a sign that something was not right in Israel...Throughout the Bible, violence against women is a symptom of a basic social flaw and a harbinger of social disintegration...”⁵⁵ The story of this daughter helps us to understand a faulty part of society, vows, and calls us to question whether vows should ever be used. Bat Jephthah teaches us that vows can create unpredictable and irreversible problems.

⁵⁴ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 104.

⁵⁵ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 116.

Bat Jephthah teaches us that power does not always mean we can completely change our situation, but we can always take agency and use our power in certain aspects. She reminds us that no situation is completely hopeless and that power can often outlive us. Bat Jephthah is only the start of our journey into the most powerful daughters, but she introduces the theme of legacy that we will see throughout this chapter.

BANOT LOT - Role Reversal

Like Bat Jephthah, Banot Lot are also anonymous and take agency in a situation involving legacy. What is quite different for the Daughters of Lot is that they ensure a lineage continues, while Bat Jephthah's sacrificial death ends one. The Daughters of Lot fear that humankind has been destroyed, and like many of the powerful daughters I have discussed, remain levelheaded and use their wit to take control of their situation. Their power is not only in their smarts, but also in their sexuality.

Interestingly enough, it is their sexuality that makes them vulnerable to being victims in the beginning of Genesis 19. Similar to Bat Jephthah, their father offers them up as sacrifices in place of his honored guest. It is their father who places their virginity in danger and it is their father who will become a pawn in their discovery of sexuality and power.

Genesis 19 opens with two angels arriving in the city of Sodom. Lot takes these angels in, not knowing their real identity. But he does try to protect them from the people of Sodom who are not at all welcoming. The men of Sodom come to Lot's door and riot for the guests to be sent out so that they can rape them. Lot offers them his two virginal daughters instead. *Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring*

them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof. (Genesis 19:8)

As modern readers, we find this situation troubling. Lot cares for strangers more than his daughters and is willing to offer those same daughters up to a hungry mob. Even if we remember that in biblical times a father had ownership of his daughter's sexuality, it is still difficult to swallow. Of course, we hear nothing from these sacrificial daughters. Their silence feels similar to that of Dinah. We realize that these daughters are powerless to stop or change their status as possible rape victims.

However, the guests of Lot come to their rescue, destroying the town and all those in it, as Lot, his wife and daughters leave and go to safety. *As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city."* (Genesis 19:15) Just as it is a man who offers up their sexuality for the taking, it is other male figures (the "messengers" of our scene) who rescue these daughters from a dangerous sexual situation. "[Lot's Daughters] are saved from being substituted by their father for his male guests whom his neighbors intend to rape..."⁵⁶ Here, Banot Lot are silent and complacent, while other men, both familiar and strange, decide their fate. It is extremely important to note that these daughters are not yet in control of their sexuality and have absolutely no power at the beginning of the chapter. This complete powerlessness makes the second half of the Banot Lot narrative, their power gain and sexual role reversal, even more dramatic.

It is not until verse 30 though, that we learn that Lot and his daughters are safe, but isolated in a cave. It is here, in the last eight verses of Genesis 19, that Banot Lot are

⁵⁶ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 66.

more than objects, and instead become the driving force of the narrative. Believing that they have witnessed the destruction of all humankind, Banot Lot realize that it is their responsibility to ensure that their lineage carries on. The older daughter devises a plan whereby they will get Lot, their father, drunk and have sexual intercourse with him. It is through this method that they will ensure the continuity of humankind, specifically their line. *Come let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.* (Genesis 19:32) “In contrast to their final hours in the city, when, in a panic, their father treated them as sex objects to trade, the young women now become decisive, action-taking subjects: it’s their father who becomes a thing to manipulate.”⁵⁷

Lot, it seems, knows very little. The measure of power and control that he held over his family early on in Genesis 19 is now gone. He is silent, instead of his daughters. In fact, both times that his daughters get him drunk and sleep with him we are told: *he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.* (Genesis 19:33b, 19:35b) It is Banot Lot, not Lot himself who we are focused on during this scene and who push the narrative along. It maybe his lineage that they are ensuring, but it is Banot Lot who are the center point of this story and thus hold the power.

Two nights in a row, Banot Lot give their father a considerable amount of wine and each one sleeps with him. Both daughters are impregnated by their father in their one night of sexual intercourse each. We are not told of Lot’s reactions to his daughter’s pregnancies. In fact, all we know about Lot and Banot Lot at the end of this episode is that each daughter gives birth to a son who will be the start of a new nation of people.

⁵⁷ Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot’s Daughters: Sex, Redemption and Women’s Quest for Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 2-3.

Thus the two Daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

(Genesis 19:36-38) The daughters' subsequent presence in the narrative is missing.

Banot Lot appear exceptional. Like a biblical version of Thelma and Louise, they have moved so far beyond what is normal for their society in the realm of female power that there is in fact, no place for them in this society. Certainly, this says a great deal about biblical society and the amount of power, both sexually and otherwise, that most daughters have. However, it makes an even greater statement about the power that Banot Lot have gained. They have truly reach new heights in terms of female sexuality and power. I will return to their example to discuss their reliance on incest.

We cannot overlook the fact that the Banot Lot give birth to two nations. The Moabites and the Ammonites are mentioned frequently throughout the TaNaKh. They are powerful nations and while they often fight against the Israelites, thereby perhaps explaining the problematic nature of their conceptions, they are certainly important to the Israelites' historical memory. The fact that these two daughters gave birth to these nations seems to redeem their complicated and unsettling act. The authors and redactors of this text would not have the Banot Lot be the mothers to two powerful nations, unless their actions were justified. "The action of the daughters of Lot was an act of love and faithfulness to their father and to the need to give life an honorable, even heroic act. In the ancestor stories of Genesis, in which God explicitly controls the opening and closing

of wombs, the pregnancy of the daughters of Lot and the birth of Ammon and Moab are a reward for their extraordinary actions.”⁵⁸

Yet, this is only one reading of the text. While Frymer-Kensky argues that the ends justify the means, it is a narrow-minded view. Certainly, these two nations are important in the course of Jewish history, but mostly in the context of being enemies. If we truly examine the text with a modern, feminist lens, then we must admit and deal with the fact that Lot was raped by his daughters. According to modern ideology, Lot could not consent to sexual intercourse because he was drunk. As feminists, we know that there is absolutely no justification for rape, not even out of a sense of revenge or being victimized oneself. This makes the power of Banot Lot complicated and forces us to question what it means that they gave birth to two nations.

We know that the Moabite people will eventually give the Israelites one of their greatest leaders – King David. David’s great-grandmother Ruth is a Moabite woman who marries into the Israelite clan. While David is an essential and powerful character, he is not at all a standard of morality. He is often involved in immoral and despicable actions which may in fact be a reflection of his ancestry. The incest and rape that takes place between Banot Lot and their father, while done with the best of intentions, may be only the beginning of moral ambiguity in the text.

Certainly the story of Lot and Banot Lot is fraught with difficulties. In one narrative, we encounter a father offering his daughters up for rape and daughters tricking their father into drinking enough so that they can sleep with him and be impregnated. One

⁵⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 263.

has to wonder if the move from almost being raped to committing incest is what makes these women powerful.

In truth most of their power comes from the acts of incest and rape, but we must go deeper to understand this. Banot Lot acquire power through these acts that are morally wrong. Certainly the negative attributes of the nations to which they give birth reflect the illicit manner of their conception. Yet, in spite of the clear biblical, and modern, objections to their methods, these daughters nonetheless prove themselves to be the mistresses of their fate.

These daughters do more than merely commit incest. They use their sexuality to their advantage. They are in control of their bodies, their sexual drives and the procreative abilities. To have control of these aspects of a woman's life are important markers of power today, and almost impossible to achieve in biblical times. Not only are they in control of their own sexuality, but they switch roles with their father and become somewhat in control of his. This same man who earlier had offered them up to be sexual victims, is now their sexual object. "Women move from sacrificial objects to reasoning subjects. From chattel, they become paradigmatic figures out to save the world."⁵⁹

The contrast between the actions of father and daughters is quite striking. When Lot is in control of the sexuality of his daughters, he offers them up as a way to appease a mob. The status of his daughters as virgins helps him maintain power and control. His daughters, however, care about more than themselves when they utilize their father's sexuality. Banot Lot are thinking as much about their father and his legacy as they are about themselves and their own. "The situation between father and daughters is

⁵⁹ Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot's Daughters: Sex, Redemption and Women's Quest for Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 10-11.

completely reversed from what it was in town. Then he sought to dispose of their sexuality to preserve life. Now, they seek to control and manage his sexuality for what they determine to be the general good, no matter what he thinks or wills.”⁶⁰ They may gain power and control through their actions, but these things are not the goal.

Banot Lot do more than just continue their lineage. They are more powerful than their moment in the narrative conveys. Their control and uninhibited use of their sexuality has caused ripple effects outside of the TaNaKh. The statement made by these strong and able daughters is that women can be in men’s roles. Seemingly-vulnerable daughters can wrest control from their father. “In Lot the father-daughter relationship becomes indispensable in the making and preservation of culture, but *Lot*, with its image of young females conspiring to take power and act also contains the seeds for transforming patriarchal culture.”⁶¹ The fact that readers and scholars are still struck by this story tells us how far-reaching is the power of the Banot Lot.

In this narrative, we continue to see daughters’ power significantly alter events outside of the family realm. Banot Lot not only take agency, like Bat Jephthah, within their situation. They also manage to make a powerful statement in regards to who controls a woman’s sexuality. These daughters begin as objects offered to preserve the sexual purity of strangers, and end their story as powerful sexual subjects. This theme of change will continue and be elaborated upon by Banot Zelophehad.

BANOT ZELOPHEHAD - Making Social Change

⁶⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁶¹ Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot’s Daughters: Sex, Redemption and Women’s Quest for Authority* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 5.

The pinnacle example of the amount of power and effect that a daughter of the bible can have comes to us in a group of daughters – the Banot Zelophehad. Where Dinah, Tamar and Michal struggle with voice, these daughters certainly succeed. And where power may be debatable for the Banot Lot and Bat Jephthah, the power of the Banot Zelophehad is indisputable. These daughters gain power within a system that would seek to disenfranchise them by manipulating that same system. Their rebellion and revision is smart and calculated, as they use the system itself to change it. Banot Zelophehad make more than ripples with their power; they make waves.

As with the other daughters in this chapter, Banot Zelophehad are concerned with legacy. We are introduced to these five daughters in Numbers 27 when their father dies. In just these first four verses, we get a glimpse into the incredible courage and power of these daughters. Banot Zelophehad come before Moses and his council in order to request that their father's property remain with them since he had no sons. *They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said...Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen.* (Numbers 27:2,4) We are acutely aware of the rare situation that the author is describing. No other women in the bible attempt to stand before Moses and rebuke his decree. Miriam tries and is chastised. "The five daughters are seen as strong. They take the initiative to obtain greater rights than women previously had. They use the concern about their father's name as a means to an end. Unlike Miriam, who was punished for challenging Moses, the daughters of

Zelophehad are rewarded; their petition is accepted.”⁶² The fact that this situation is so different from any we have encountered before in the text tells us that something special will happen here.

Immediately, these daughters have power because they step forward. “The issue of daughters’ inheritance in the absence of male offspring is not presented as an abstract legal precedent but as an impassioned plea for justice.”⁶³ These daughters make an impact because they represent the reality of the Israelite society. Their mere presence reminds those in charge that not everything works according to the ideal laws and regulations that are in place. In some sense, these women represent a new kind of power – the power of presence. Unlike Michal and Tamar in the previous chapter, who strove for a voice and not just a presence, Banot Zelophehad are able to gain power just by standing up and being noticed.

Certainly, we cannot deny that there is also strength in numbers here. Unlike any of the other cases I have presented, there are five daughters here. They do not have to stand alone, or even in a pair as is the case of the Banot Lot. That there are five of them already gives them a certain amount of ability and power. With five, they have less to be afraid of and can find security and strength in each other. We know that there is safety in numbers, and in this case, there is power in numbers. Five here represents many more who did not stand with them. Bat Jephthah’s voice is not made more powerful by standing with a group because she uses her voice to create that group. Nor does her group ever stand together to protest her situation. Banot Lot came as a pair but they thought

⁶² Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 93.

⁶³ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1996), 827.

they were the end of humanity, so they do not think about the larger community. Banot Zelophehad have an established group that they do not need to create, a group that works together and recognizes its place within the larger societal context. Banot Zelophehad are able to use their sense of a collective in a way that the other daughters of this chapter were not.

Nor are they anonymous within their grouping. Each of the Daughters of Zelophehad is named - Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah - giving them individual identities to go along with their group identity. Banot Lot may be a pair, but they are not given names. Their distinction from one another comes by age and to which nation they give birth. To name five women who appear for such a short time is a way for the editor to bestow power and magnitude on these women. Their names are a reminder to us that these five daughters have an important role to play in the history of our people and while their story is short, it is not to be overlooked. The names of these daughters are repeated three times throughout the Book of Numbers,⁶⁴ as if to remind us that these characters are significant. As mentioned in chapter one, unnamed characters are often forgotten about because of their anonymity. If Banot Zelophehad are not only named, but named numerous times then we are clearly not supposed to forget about them.

It is true that most often, however, these daughters are identified by their father's name and as a group. Yet, even when they are grouped and identified as their father's daughters they gain power, specifically political and legal power. By referring to them as the Banot Zelophehad, we are reminded that they come on behalf of their father, and they represent many daughters. "The daughters of Zelophehad are of course identified with

⁶⁴ Numbers 26:33, 27:1, 36:11

their father, but their initiative, even if it is for his sake, shows them to be strong women.”⁶⁵

The plea of these five daughters does not fall on deaf ears. Moses takes their case to God, and God believes that their case has merit, telling Moses to make an exception to the laws by which property is passed on. *And the Lord said to Moses: The plea of the Zelophehad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.* (Numbers 27:6) The fact that Moses brings the case of the Banot Zelophehad before God shows that these women were powerful. The head of the people felt moved enough by their plea to attempt not just any change, but Divine change.

God's edict does not end here. “Instead of defining the matter as a specific case concerning the daughters of Zelophehad and leaving it there, God elaborates on the divine judgment by stating a general principle.”⁶⁶ God explains to Moses that from this point forward if a man has only daughters, his property may transfer to her upon his death. If one has no children, the property shall go to other male relatives. Daughters, while second to sons, are higher than other male relatives. Not just the Daughters of Zelophehad, but all daughters gain power through the request of these particular ones. While the law is altered slightly at the end of the Book of Numbers to state that daughters must marry within the tribe to keep the land within the Israelite community, it is Moses who does this, not God. God does not make this alteration. The divine ruling is still one that calls for full, no-strings attached equality for daughters.

⁶⁵ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 96.

⁶⁶ Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 177.

The Daughters of Zelophehad succeed for various reasons. First, they voice a concern that is shared by all members of a small tribal community. “They are worried about the preservation of their father’s name...The daughters articulate a shrewd worldly concern.”⁶⁷ Their worries about legacy, inheritance and land are wide spread and are not just issues that women have. “The chief concern is not to lose the inheritance pertaining to the clan, not to allow the ‘name’ of the clan to disappear.”⁶⁸ By saving their small amount of political capital for an issue that affects the entire community, these daughters are able to make a much larger impact than if it had been an issue specific to the woman’s domain.

The Daughters of Zelophehad also succeed because they are articulate. Numerous times throughout my discussion of daughters and power, I have explained the importance of women choosing their words wisely. Tamar, Michal, and Bat Jephthah all present articulate arguments which gives them more of a voice in the text, as their statements are both longer and more distinct from that of their inarticulate male counterparts. Women had little power and little voice, thus it was always essential that they sound intelligent and thoughtful when they spoke. As with any disenfranchised group, when you have less chance to speak, you must make your words count even more when those opportunities arise.

Barot Zelophehad are certainly the most powerful of the biblical daughters we have discussed. They have voice and agency. They go before the most powerful of men and have their case taken all the way to the highest point in ancient Israelite hierarchy –

⁶⁷ Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175.

⁶⁸ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1996), 827

God. And while Bat Jephthah and Banot Lot are powerful daughters who make change, they are never able to fully reenter society. Banot Zelophehad, on the other hand, remain full female members of the Israelite society, never having to remove themselves from the community. Their powerful, society-changing ripples come during their lifetime and continue after it. Banot Zelophehad exemplify powerful biblical daughters as the change they are able to make is widespread and systemic. From their example, it is impossible not to believe that daughters of the bible, no matter how seemingly disenfranchised, are capable of achieving and maintaining power while using it to make significant change.

CONCLUSION: **WHAT THE DAUGHTERS GIVE US**

“The women who appear in biblical stories are often striking characters, distinct personalities who have gone beyond the confines of the tales in which they appear to become important figures in our cultural memory.”⁶⁹ And the daughters of this thesis have made a huge impact, no matter how short their time in the text. From Bat Pharaoh to Banot Zelophehad, the tales of these daughters teach us that power is certainly possible, even for the most disenfranchised and forgotten characters in our biblical narrative.

We know that there are biblical daughters who never find their voices and never gain any kind of power. Dinah serves as a stark reminder of this fact. She takes one small step outside the confines of the family structure and is punished, not only by rape, but also by banishment from the text. Just because Dinah is powerless, does not mean that the same will apply to every other daughter. Perhaps more poignantly, the step she takes in her narrative paves the way for the others daughters who follow her.

Tamar and Michal teach us that power comes in different forms, and it need not always be used for change to be classified as real power. These two daughters find their voices inside a palace where men vie for power and control. They may never alter their situation the way that they, or we, want, but they make their complaints known. They refuse to just conform or be complacent. They are not silenced. They use their voices eloquently and articulately when the men around them do not, and thus they gain a degree

⁶⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 333.

of power despite its limited uses. “These women are surely presented as the heroines of their stories; the men around them are bumbling, cruel, foolish, or all three.”⁷⁰

Bat Jephthah also speaks with incredible poise, but she is able to actually alter her situation with her words. Bat Jephthah, realizing that it is not always possible to change all things, exercises agency to have her fate happen on her own terms. For her, power does not end with gaining a voice. Rather, she opens the door to the possibility of utilizing power to make change. While her use of power may seem minute, it is a step forward on the continuum.

Banot Lot take another step forward. These two unnamed daughters move from completely powerless and victimized to fully independent daughters, taking charge of their sexuality and their family legacy. Certainly their story and power is fraught with complexity, but we cannot deny that they have power, which they utilize to change their situation for the better.

Banot Zelophehad reach new heights as they achieve power and use it to make widespread change. They come out of the crowd, speaking to the leaders of the Israelite people and convince Moses and God that equality for women in the case of inheritance law is necessary. Their voices trigger societal change that grants all women more power in the patriarchal legal system.

The daughters throughout this thesis have proven that even in the most hierarchal and seemingly oppressive society, it is possible for someone to persevere, obtain power and utilize it. These daughters do not remain silent and complacent. They find their voices and speak out. While it is not always possible, there are times when they can

⁷⁰ Susan Niditch, *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, editor Judith R. Basikin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 41.

change their own situation and, once and a while even change the reality for many others.

If biblical daughters, who are the most vulnerable and dependent members of a family in a patriarchal society, are able to achieve power, then it is possible for anyone, in any circumstance, to do so. These women are not held down by societal expectations. They maneuver around the social and developmental theories that would dictate their lives, creating new paths and new relationship dynamics. And in so doing, they “...explore the tense dialogue between the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter female voices which attempt to put forth other truths.”⁷¹ When we reread our text with a revisionist and feminist lens, we discover the heights of power that these daughters achieve. In revisiting and reinterpreting these daughter-narratives, we begin to identify those other biblical stories in which a biblical woman may reach for and hold on to some power.

Most importantly, these daughters prove that there are positive female narratives in our biblical text. In reexamining these narratives, we can uncover new possibilities in an old text. These stories can help us to see women as something other than victims of patriarchy, helping us to rethink the potential for biblical women. “If art imitates life, scripture likewise reflects it in both holiness and horror. Reflections themselves neither mandate nor manufacture change; yet by enabling insight, they may inspire repentance. In other words, sad stories may yield new beginnings.”⁷² By rereading these stories within the context of voice and power, we have gained a new light on our texts.

These stories remind us of the richness of the Torah and help us to consider women

⁷¹ Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 4.

⁷² Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2.

in other periods of Jewish history. When we remove our biases in studying even the most patriarchal of texts and deeply analyze even the shortest and most minimal stories about women in our text, we can add these stories to our broader understanding of Judaism. “Reconstructing women’s history enables us to see that ‘Judaism’ has always been richer, more complex, and more diverse than either ‘normative’ sources or most branches of modern Judaism would admit. It permits us to see that Torah embraces many patterns and variations of religious experience, that its boundaries are far broader than traditionally allowed.”⁷³

I began studying the daughters of the bible in hope of finding my own voice and my own story as a daughter and a Jewish woman. Throughout rabbinical school I have worried that I would never be able to join the feminist and Jewish parts of myself. I struggled with what it meant to be a feminist and still embrace a tradition and religion so filled with patriarchal and subordinating ideas. Delving into the narratives of the daughters of the bible was a path to discover whether I could be the type of feminist biblical scholar who could embrace and reinterpret text, not merely disregard it.

In studying the daughters of the bible, I have found new biblical heroines and found a way to make the text my own. I have learned that voice is the most basic type of power that we can grant anyone. I have come to realize that no matter how hierarchal or constricting a society is, anyone can break free and find a niche for herself. In discovering the voices and power of the daughters of the bible, I have been able to find my own voice and power as a rabbi and a biblical scholar.

⁷³ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From A Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 51.

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