

ABSTRACT

Good Queen Mothers, Bad Queen Mothers: The Theological Presentation of the Queen Mother in 1 and 2 Kings

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The regnal formulas in 1-2 Kings list the name of the mother of the king for Judah, signaling an importance on the part of the queen mother and her place within the theological presentation of the books. This dissertation investigates the multiple passages in which the mother of the king appears outside of the regnal formulas through literary criticism and integrates that study with a theological discussion of the regnal formulas in order to demonstrate the narrative's view of the queen mother's place in the monarchy. As the *gēbirā*, the queen mother held a sanctioned position within the Judean court and had such great influence upon her son that she too receives blame as part of the monarchy for the fall of Judah.

The books of Kings depict Maacah (1 Kgs 15), Athaliah (2 Kgs 11), and Nehushta (2 Kgs 24), the only queen mothers to appear outside of the formulas, as wicked and acting in the same manner as the kings who receive a negative or qualified evaluation of their reigns. The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel depict Nehushta (Jer 13, 22, 29) and Hamutal (Ezek 19) as wicked as well. Jezebel, appearing only in Kings (2 Kgs 9), receives the same treatment. These texts combine to show a *mythos* surrounding the

queen mother, that she is a wicked queen mother by virtue of her son ruling during the divided monarchy.

Three other queen mothers, who are not from the divided monarchy, appear in other biblical texts: Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1-2), Lemuel's mother (Prov 31), and Belshazzar's mother (Dan 5). Also, Genesis depicts Sarah as a proto-queen mother (Gen 16-21). The texts characterize these women as good queen mothers, acting in a contradictory manner from the queen mothers of the divided monarchy. The queen mother outside of the divided monarchy can be a good queen mother even if she is foreign. These good queen mothers contrast with the wicked queen mothers and strengthen the *mythos* that the queen mother of the divided monarchy is wicked and she holds such a powerful, influential position that she is at fault, along with her son, for the exile of the nation.

Good Queen Mothers, Bad Queen Mothers:
The Theological Presentation of the Queen Mother in 1 and 2 Kings

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ABD | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 Vols. New York, 1992. |
| ADD | <i>Assyrian Deeds and Documents</i> . C. H. W. Johns. 4 vols. Cambridge, 1898-1924 |
| AnSt | <i>Anatolian Studies</i> |
| AOAT | Alter Orient und Altes Testament |
| AOTC | Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries |
| ARAB | <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . Daniel David Luckenbill. 2 vols. Chicago, 1926-1927. |
| ATD | Das Alte Testament Deutsch |
| AUSS | <i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i> |
| BA | <i>Biblical Archaeologist</i> |
| BDB | Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907 |
| BibInt | <i>Biblical Interpretation</i> |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| BKAT | Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament. Edited by M. Noth and H. W. Wolff |
| BRev | <i>Bible Review</i> |
| BWANT | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| CAH | <i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> |
| CANE | <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995. |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CBQMS | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series |
| CC | Continental Commentaries |
| COS | <i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997- |
| EBC | <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> . |
| ETL | <i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i> |
| FCB | Feminist Companion to the Bible |
| FOTL | Forms of the Old Testament Literature |
| FRLANT | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| HKAT | Handkommentar zum Alten Testament |
| HALOT | Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden. 1994-1999 |

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| IBC | Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| <i>IEJ</i> | <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> |
| <i>Int</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| ITC | International Theological Commentary |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| <i>JBQ</i> | <i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i> |
| <i>JCS</i> | <i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i> |
| <i>JNES</i> | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> |
| <i>JNSL</i> | <i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i> |
| <i>JSOT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| <i>KAI</i> | <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften.</i> H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2d ed. Wiesbaden, 1966-1969 |
| <i>KTU</i> | <i>Die keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit.</i> Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. |
| <i>KUB</i> | <i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i> |
| <i>MdB</i> | <i>Le Monde de la Bible</i> |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| <i>NIB</i> | <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> |
| <i>NIDB</i> | <i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| OBT | Overtures to Biblical Theology |
| <i>OLP</i> | <i>Orientalia lovaniensia periodica</i> |
| OTG | Old Testament Guides |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| <i>Presb</i> | <i>Presbyterion</i> |
| <i>RS</i> | <i>Ras Shamra</i> |
| SAA | State Archives of Assyria |
| SB | Sources bibliques |
| SBLMS | Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series |
| SBT | Studies in Biblical Theology |
| <i>SJOT</i> | <i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i> |
| SSN | Studia semitica neerlandica |
| TBC | Torch Bible Commentaries |
| <i>TDOT</i> | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974- |
| <i>ThTo</i> | <i>Theology Today</i> |
| <i>TM</i> | <i>Catalogo dei testi cuneiformi di Tell Mardikh-Ebla</i> |
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries |
| <i>TZ</i> | <i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| <i>VT</i> | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| VTSup | Vetus Testamentum Supplements |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| <i>ZAW</i> | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> |

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*For my grandfather Pippa, my hero,
whose life and words of encouragement
give me strength throughout*

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Mystery of the Queen Mother

The Hebrew Bible has its share of royal women (e.g., 1 Sam 18; 1 Kgs 10:1-10//2 Chr 9:1-9; 1 Kgs 11:19; Ps 45; Esther; Dan 5:10-12; Neh 2:6). The majority of the royal women located in the text are queen mothers.¹ A vast number of them appear in relation to their sons, the kings, as their status is defined by their sons' reigns.² Even in Proverbs, one may find a direct relationship between a queen mother and her son. Proverbs 31:1-9 records the words of King Lemuel of Massa as taught to him by his mother. This manual of instructions is unique in that no other instructions in ancient Near Eastern literature are addressed to a king or prince by his mother even though queen mothers were known to influence the policies and theological stances of the kings.³ The characterization of mothers in instructional texts, such as Prov 31:1-9, is that a son's success directly reflects

¹ The term "queen mother" is problematic in that the mother of the king is not always his biological mother, as Maacah appears to be Asa's grandmother (see 1 Kgs 15:1-3, 9-11). Also, two of the fifteen Judean queen mothers and one of the northern queen mothers are given the appellative "gēbîrâ" (Maacah [1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Chr 15:16], Jezebel [2 Kgs 10:13], and Nehushta [Jer 13:18; 29:2]). This term is also extremely problematic, which I will later address in the history of research. The term "queen mother" can be confused with the queen or the woman who is the mother of the crown prince, which is not the case for this dissertation. Here, the queen mother is the mother of the man who is king after he has assumed kingship. For simplicity's sake, I will designate the women named in the regnal formulas as "queen mother" or as mother of the king.

² Jezebel (2 Kgs 9) and Athaliah (2 Kgs 11) also act outside their relationships with their sons.

³ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *CBQ* 45 (Apr 1983), 192; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, NICOT (ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 503.

upon her and her instruction. A mother is the epitome of power and influence specifically because she *is* a mother.⁴

Narratives regarding royal mothers, their roles, and the result of their actions upon their sons are concentrated in 1 and 2 Kings. Bathsheba, the only queen mother of the united monarchy, is instrumental in securing Solomon's succession to the throne (1 Kgs 1-2). From the first king of Judah after the division of the monarchy, Rehoboam, to the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, Scripture records, with only two exceptions (the reigns of Jehoram and Ahaz), the names of the mothers of those kings. The mothers of the kings are named in seventeen of the nineteen regnal formulas for the Judean monarchy, two of the mothers, Maacah and Hamutal, serving for two reigns each. Such a high concentration of women's names in a particular category is virtually non-existent in the Hebrew Bible, especially since many women in the narrative are unnamed. Of the seventeen mothers named, only three figure in the narrative beyond their naming in the formulas: Maacah, the mother of Abijam and grandmother of Asa (1 Kgs 15:1-2, 9-10, 13); Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah (2 Kgs 8:25-26; 11:1-16); and Nehushta, the mother of Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:8, 12, 15). While the mother of the king is not named for the northern kings, Jezebel functions for a short time as a queen mother (2 Kgs 9).

If the queen mother held such an honor as to be named in the regnal formulas and figured prominently during the history of the divided monarchy, then it seems she must have held some type of role within the royal court, at least in Judah. The Hebrew Bible uses the appellative *gēbîrâ* for three of the mothers (Maacah: 1 Kgs 15:13//2 Chr 15:16; Jezebel: 2 Kgs 10:13; and Nehushta: Jer 13:18; 29:2), leading to questions of the function

⁴ Carole Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs and Performance in Biblical Wisdom*, JSOTSup 356 (ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 27.

of a *gēbîrâ*. Did the appellative denote a queen mother or only a “great lady,” and did the term imbue a sanctioned position within the court? The text does not explicitly detail the historical role of the queen mother nor concretely describe who is a *gēbîrâ*. Neither does the author(s) or redactor(s) give the reader an unambiguous purpose for naming the queen mother in the regnal formulas for Judah.

History of Research

Much of the scholarly debate on the queen mother in the past thirty years questions why the text features the mother of the king so prominently as to name her in almost all of the regnal formulas, as I will show below. From this question comes the debate of what role the mother of the king served and whether the position was official. The focus of scholarship has centered mostly upon determining the historical function(s) of the queen mother. Although the cornerstone work on the queen mother was written by Georg Molin in 1954,⁵ scholarly work on the question of the queen mother and her status and role has flourished mostly within the past twenty-five years. Niels-Erik Andreasen’s 1983 work⁶ sparked greater interest in the subject. A second area of interest for scholarship is the determination of the term *gēbîrâ* in relation to the mother of the king. In regards to the regnal formulas, no sustained works regarding the queen mother’s place in the formulas currently exist.

In the following discussion of the queen mother in existing scholarship, three roles come into play: social, political, and religious. Also, some scholars have posited

⁵ Georg Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” *TZ* 10 (1954): 161-175.

⁶ Andreasen, “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society,” 179-194.

that she did not have a role.⁷ First, the queen mother's position was evidence of a particular social structure that garnered her power and respect. Second, she was gifted with political roles by virtue of her position, such as counselor to the king. Third, she acted in a cultic role, either as having the power to propagate a foreign cult or symbolizing the feminine divine on earth. Fourth, the mother of the king had no prescribed role and only the ambitious, individual mothers rose to power and the text mentions them as a result.

A Position of Power and Respect: Her Social Role

In *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, Johannes Pedersen equates the queen mother with the term *gēbîrâ*, granting her special honor because of the title. He cites Solomon's prostration before Bathsheba the queen mother (1 Kgs 2:19) as demonstration of the respect due her.⁸ The importance of the position is demonstrated by the fact that Asa removes Maacah as *gēbîrâ*. Pedersen considers the position as having foreign origins but the divided kingdoms adopted the foreign concept because of the position's relation with the early Israelite conception of the mother.⁹ Pedersen does not describe what roles the queen mother may have played but characterizes her as being honored and respected by those around her.

⁷ Throughout the history of research, I draw upon my master's thesis for material prior to 2006 ("Death, Demotion, and Exile: The Roles of Maacah, Athaliah, and Nehushta Reexamined" [Th.M. thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, 2006], 7-16).

⁸ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture, III-IV* (London: Oxford University, 1940), 72.

⁹ Pederson, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, 72

Georg Molin argues for more than one role for the queen mother but ultimately emphasizes a social position in “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda.”¹⁰ Drawing on Hittite evidence, Molin concludes that the position of the queen mother originated in a matriarchal society. She played a large role in ensuring the succession of her son as king, therefore solidifying her importance and official rank and giving her rights to other roles.¹¹ Molin first posits that the queen mother or *gēbîrâ* held a significant political position. This position was so powerful in the royal court that she was second only to the king and retained this title for life or for the duration of her son’s reign.¹² Her position also depended upon her son. For example, Hamutal was the queen mother for Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:31) but not for Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:36) or Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:8). She then assumed the position again for Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:18).¹³ Molin also argues that the queen mother had some type of cultic function based on Maacah’s use of her position to propagate the Asherah cult (1 Kgs 15:13).¹⁴ Molin concludes his article by suggesting that the queen mother’s role in the succession of the king granted her respect, power, political and religious roles, and an official social position in the royal court.

In “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” P. Henri Cazelles asks, “Aux titres royaux du Christ ainsi énumérés correspond-il un titre de Marie?”¹⁵ While

¹⁰ Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 161-175.

¹¹ Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 172-175.

¹² Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 161, 163-164.

¹³ Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 164.

¹⁴ Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 165.

¹⁵ P. Henri Cazelles, “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” *Maria et Ecclesia* 5 (1959): 39. See also, Cazelles’ similar brief article, “La maternité royale dans l’Ancien Testament,” *MdB* 32 (Jan-Feb 1984): 3-4

the answer takes him in various directions, he does correlate Mary, the mother of Christ the King, with the queen mother of the Judean king. Cazelles finds similar expressions of the queen mother in ancient texts of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syrio-Palestine.¹⁶ After exploring these foreign queen mothers, he turns to the Old Testament texts. The queen mother is the woman who gives birth to the *héro* who will become king and her great importance lies in the listing of her name in relation to the king.¹⁷ Cazelles notes not only the queen mothers, such as Bathsheba, Maacah and Nehushta, but also the *almah* of Isa 7:14 and Lady Wisdom in Prov 8.¹⁸ Cazelles then equates Christ with Wisdom and Mary as the mother of Wisdom incarnate and the queen mother of the Messiah-King, the latter epithet in connection with the importance of the woman who gives birth to the king in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁹

Roland de Vaux presents a subsection of one of his chapters on “The Great Lady” in his work *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*.²⁰ According to de Vaux, the *gēbîrâ* held an official rank in the Judean court. As such, the title likely bestowed dignity and special powers. Her position did not stem from her influence over her son but from her authority as queen mother. The fact that the text names the mother of the king in all but two regnal formulas indicates an official position. Without explicitly stating so, de Vaux implies that all these mothers were accorded the title of *gēbîrâ*, citing the usage of the

¹⁶ Cazelles, “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 40-48

¹⁷ Cazelles, “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 49-50.

¹⁸ Cazelles, “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 50-54.

¹⁹ Cazelles, “La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 54-56.

²⁰ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

term with Maacah, Jezebel, and Nehushta.²¹ Like Pedersen, de Vaux does not offer any roles for the queen mother but gifts her with powers based on her position, which also grants her dignity and respect.

T. Omas Ihromi focuses upon the queen mother's origin as listed in the regnal formulas and how her origin affects the succession of the kingship in "Die Königinmutter und der 'Amm Ha' Arez im Reich Juda."²² Ihromi details the circumstances surrounding the ascension of Joash, Jehoahaz, and Zedekiah. In order for these three kings to be crowned, "the people of the land" intervene in some fashion and choose a king whose mother is from a Judean province.²³ Christopher R. Seitz expands on Ihromi's findings in *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* and posits that "the people of the land" who intervene in the king's succession, which also include Azariah and Josiah, are from the Judean provinces themselves and have recently relocated to Jerusalem. The mother herself did not have an active role in her son's succession but her place of origin may have very well influenced "the people of the land."²⁴

In *The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel*, Tomoo Ishida assigns the title of *gēbîrâ* to the queen mother and names it as an official rank.²⁵ Ishida admits that the mothers listed in the regnal formulas were not necessarily the biological mothers of the kings but rather the queen mothers for their reigns. Maacah's removal from office and Athaliah's

²¹ De Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, 117.

²² T. Omas Ihromi, "Die Königinmutter und der 'Amm Ha' Arez im Reich Juda," *VT* 24, 4 (Oct 1974): 421-429.

²³ Ihromi, "Die Königinmutter," 421-429.

²⁴ Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 48-66.

²⁵ Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977).

usurpation of the throne are witness to the power the “Great Lady” possessed.²⁶

According to Ishida, no evidence exists that the queen mother had an official voice in naming the heir-apparent.²⁷ Ishida does not describe the roles of the queen mothers but describes a social position of power based upon the respect afforded the women as queen mothers.

Ktziah Spanier has written extensively on three of the queen mothers: Maacah, Athaliah, and Abi. In “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah—A Case Study,” Spanier claims that the source of a queen mother’s authority involved two social aspects: her ancestry and her marriage contract, both of which determined the extent of her power.²⁸ The wife with the most favorable terms in the marriage contract received the title of chief wife and the royal court afforded her a superior position. Her son would be appointed to the throne regardless of the age of the other sons. She came into her full authority after her husband’s death. She retained this position and its privileges throughout her lifetime or her son’s reign.²⁹ Spanier then proceeds convincingly to use Maacah as an example for her argument. Spanier makes the same claim in “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah and Athaliah” and “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court: Athalia and Abi.”³⁰ In all three articles, she does not

²⁶ Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, 156.

²⁷ Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, 157.

²⁸ Ktziah Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah—A Case Study,” in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (FCB; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 186-195.

²⁹ Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah,” 187.

³⁰ Ktziah Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah and Athaliah,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994), 75-82; Ktziah Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court: Athalia and

contend that the queen mother's position was official nor does she claim that all queen mothers were titled with *gēbîrâ*.

Beverly W. Cushman compares the role of the *gēbîrâ* in the ancient Israelite monarchy with the role of the Great Lady of the harem in the Ottoman Empire in "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba."³¹ Cushman draws on other royal courts of the ancient Near East with a focus on the Ottomans to demonstrate that the Great Lady (*gēbîrâ* for ancient Israel) was in charge of the ruler's harem with access to both the inner and outer palace in order to manage the harem and the household and to influence succession.³² Cushman argues that ancient Israel correlates with these societies, and the women who are *gēbîrôt* filled the same function of household management and dynastic persuasion.³³ Cushman follows with the example of Bathsheba, arguing that she is a *gēbîrâ*, particularly due to her influence upon David with regard to Solomon's succession and due to Adonijah's plea to her for Abishag.³⁴

The Counseling Queen Mother: Her Political Role

In "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," Herbert Donner also agrees that the roots of the queen mother's role lay in Hittite culture rather

Abi," in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* (JSOTSup 273; ed. Meir Lubetski, Claire Lubetski, Sharon Keller; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 136-149.

³¹ Beverly W. Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," *JSOT* 30, 3 (2006): 327-343.

³² Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," 329-334. Cushman notes that the Great Lady may be either the wife or the mother of the ruler ("The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," 330 n 1).

³³ Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," 334-336.

³⁴ Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," 336-340.

than in ancient matriarchy.³⁵ Despite the gap in time between the disintegration of the Hittite empire and the institution of the Israelite monarchy, he argues that the political structures of Hittite culture continued in northern Syria into the first millennium BCE.³⁶ From Syria, along with the political structures of Canaan and Egypt, the Hittite political system influenced the united monarchy in Jerusalem.³⁷ Therefore, in Judah, the queen mother, whom he also identifies as the *gēbîrâ*, was an officially sanctioned position, which the king treated with deference. More than that, however, she also wielded power within the court second only to the king.³⁸

Along with Molin, Niels-Erik A. Andreasen's "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society" is one of the most influential works on the queen mother.³⁹ Using Bathsheba as his main example, he argues that the chief function of the position of queen mother in Judah was that of senior counselor to the king and the people.⁴⁰ She was involved in the succession and stability of the kingdom, served as counselor in the political and judiciary affairs at court, and possibly was a mediator between political factions in the nation.⁴¹ Andreasen writes: "The queen mother could circumscribe royal power to some extent and could represent the interests of people or court before the king,

³⁵ Herbert Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August 1958 gewidmet* (ed. Richard von Kienle et al; Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), 123-130.

³⁶ Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," 126.

³⁷ Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," 126.

³⁸ Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," 106-107.

³⁹ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 179-194.

⁴⁰ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 191.

⁴¹ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 188-189.

thereby providing a sort of buffer between king and people.”⁴² He also uses Athaliah and Nehushta as examples and King Lemuel’s mother in Prov 31:1-9 as a standard to justify his conclusion. Andreasen also refutes the theory that the queen mother’s role was to participate only in cultic activities.

Athalya Brenner, in *The Israelite Woman*, does not accord every queen mother with the title of *gēbîrâ* but states that a woman may be granted the title.⁴³ She then attempts to ascertain if the title held any official rank. A queen mother became the *gēbîrâ* when “circumstances cause(d) a gap in the usual transition of political power from a male monarch to his heir.”⁴⁴ She was accorded the title when she functioned as a regent for the young king. When her son attained legal maturity and political support and her emergency regency was over, she returned to the relatively powerless position of queen mother.⁴⁵ The queen mother’s power, therefore, only came through her acting as a regent, a political position, for her son.

Elna Solvang devotes an entire chapter to the queen mother’s character in *A Woman’s Place is in the House*.⁴⁶ Solvang does not equate the mother of the king with the queen mother but considers the queen mother and the *gēbîrâ* to be the same. Solvang argues that it is not possible to develop a “comprehensive theory” of an “office” with

⁴² Andreasen, “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society,” 194.

⁴³ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in the Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 17.

⁴⁴ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 19.

⁴⁵ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 19-20.

⁴⁶ Elna Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David*, JSOTSup 349 (ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

regard to the title *gēbîrâ* because it is so rarely used.⁴⁷ She states that the *gēbîrâ* and her connection to the royal house cannot be separated. All mothers of the kings had political status and function but some carried out their functions better than others. Some became a queen mother, *gēbîrâ*, while others did not.⁴⁸

The Worshipping Queen Mother: Her Religious Role

Gösta W. Ahlström centers his investigation of the queen mother around Maacah in *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* to conclude a religious function for the queen mother.⁴⁹ For Ahlström, the *gēbîrâ* was an official position because Asa, the king, could dismiss Maacah from it. She was therefore more than simply the king's mother.⁵⁰ He concludes that the queen mother's position was virtually equal to that of the king, citing that Bathsheba and Nehushta sat at the king's right hand and almost all of the mothers of the Judean kings are mentioned.⁵¹ Based on his study of the elevation of the Asherah cult to that of Yahwistic worship and the parallels with the queen mother in Hittite and Syro-Phoenecian cultures, Ahlström suggests

that the office of *gēbîrâh* in Israel was primarily religious in its motivation, and was based on some cultic function. The queen mother may once, as consort of the king, have symbolized the virgin goddess in the *hieros gamos* ceremony. The position of the queen mother as *gēbîrâh* is thus an ideological replica of that of the mother of the gods in the congregation of the gods.⁵²

⁴⁷ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 77.

⁴⁸ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 78.

⁴⁹ Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Lund: Gleerup, 1963), 57-79.

⁵⁰ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 61.

⁵¹ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 62-63.

⁵² Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 75-76.

His conclusion is that no other possible explanation exists for the queen mother's office but her part as consort of the king in the *hieros gamos* ritual.⁵³

Samuel L. Terrien agrees with Ahlström about the queen mother's part in cultic activities in "The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion."⁵⁴ For Terrien, the *gēbîrâ* was an office held by all queen mothers. The office "had a cultic function which is no longer clear from present documents."⁵⁵ Referencing the Asherah cult and its relation to the omphalos myth, he concludes that the queen mother functioned in a mystical or sacramental role in the principle of monarchic succession.⁵⁶

Susan Ackerman adds a sanctioned cultic role to the other functions of the queen mother, arguing that explanations of her religious function have not been convincingly demonstrated in the past. Ackerman's article, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," is a response to Zafrira Ben-Barak's argument that only the individual ambitious queen mother demonstrates power through instigating her younger son's rise to the throne.⁵⁷ In this article and in "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," Ackerman argues that the official responsibility of the *gēbîrâ* (equating all queen mothers with this term) was to devote herself to the cult and worship of the mother

⁵³ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 79.

⁵⁴ Samuel L. Terrien, "The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion," *VT* 20 (July 1970): 315-338.

⁵⁵ Terrien, "The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion," 330.

⁵⁶ Terrien, "The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion," 330-331.

⁵⁷ Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112 (Fall 1993), 285-401.

goddess Asherah.⁵⁸ Ackerman agrees with Andreasen that the queen mother had socio-political functions in ancient Israel but that her cultic role could not be divorced from those other functions. Her devotion to Asherah, however, was her primary role among all of them.⁵⁹

Ackerman first points to 1 Kgs 15:13, which narrates the removal of Maacah from being the *gēbîrâ* for making an image for Asherah. She argues that it was normative in Judah to worship both Asherah and Yahweh in the temple in Jerusalem during the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries BCE.⁶⁰ As 2 Kgs 10:13 labels Jezebel a *gēbîrâ*, Ackerman makes a case for this queen mother's involvement in the worship of Asherah.⁶¹ As Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel and Ahab, according to Ackerman, Athaliah may have promoted the Asherah cult since she promoted the worship of Baal.⁶² Ackerman also argues that Nehushta may have been a participant in the Asherah cult based on the etymology of her name, which means "snake."⁶³

Another argument for Ackerman's belief that the queen mother functioned in an official cultic role is the motif of divine sonship in Judean royal ideology. The king became the adopted son of Yahweh and the queen mother then represented the heavenly counterpart: Asherah. State and popular religion considered Asherah to be the consort to

⁵⁸ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 388; and Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 179-209.

⁵⁹ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 388.

⁶⁰ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 391.

⁶¹ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 392-395.

⁶² Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 296.

⁶³ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 396-398.

Yahweh and, therefore, worshipped her alongside Yahweh.⁶⁴ Ackerman then continues Andreasen's argument that the queen mother was an official counselor by claiming the queen mother could only fulfill that role because she represented the goddess Asherah within the monarchy.⁶⁵

Ackerman devotes two sections to the queen mother in the third chapter of *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*.⁶⁶ She sets up the political role of the queen mother as being able to serve as counselor and as regent, citing Bathsheba, Athaliah, and Nehushta as counselors and Athaliah and Nehushta as regents.⁶⁷ She then turns to the religious role of the queen mother, once again citing the cultic involvement of Maacah, Jezebel, and Athaliah.⁶⁸ She arrives at the same conclusion of the queen mother's role in sacral kingship but, this time, concludes that the queen mother is allowed to act as regent: "besides the king, she is the only member of the royal court who can be said to have a familiar relationship with a god."⁶⁹

In "Queen Mothers in the Old Testament: The Public Role of Women," Beatrice Higiro Kamusiime concludes that the queen mother held multiple roles, including social

⁶⁴ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 400; and Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East, 180.

⁶⁵ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 401. Ackerman's article "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East" is a continuation of "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel." She does not make the arguments that Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, and Nehushta are involved in the Asherah cult but assumes that one has read the previous article. She then makes her case for divine sonship/sacral kingship in the ancient Near East and applies the concept to Judah and the queen mother's function.

⁶⁶ Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

⁶⁷ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137-138.

⁶⁸ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 143-150.

⁶⁹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 154.

and political, but that her central function was cultic.⁷⁰ In arriving at this conclusion, Kamusiime takes offense with the negative presentation of the queen mothers (e.g., Maacah's worship of Asherah [1 Kgs 15:13]; Jezebel's worship of Baal and Asherah [1 Kgs 18:19]; Athaliah's order to kill the remaining Davidic heirs [2 Kgs 11:1]) and aims to prove that queen mothers could be either good or bad leaders.⁷¹ Kamusiime notes the text's accusation of woman as the origin and embodiment of evil (e.g., Gen 3:1 ff, Eccl 7:26-28; Sir 25:23) and acknowledges the negative roles of the queen mothers who participated in foreign cults.⁷² She argues, however, that the mother of the king was the human representative of Asherah, who was Yahweh's consort, in popular religion and, therefore, no ordinary woman rendered "negligible" by patriarchal standards. She maintains that the authors then suppressed the revered office and the queen mothers' great deeds and it is our responsibility to uncover her positive influence and contributions.⁷³

Individual Ambition Rather Than General Rule: No Official Role

Zafrira Ben-Barak argues against any defined role and function in two of her articles on the queen mother. In "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," she examines queen consorts involved in the accession of their sons to the throne in various regions in the ancient Near East, including Israel, Judah, Assyria,

⁷⁰ Beatrice Higiroy Kamusiime, "Queen Mothers in the Old Testament: The Public Role of Women," in *Holy Texts: Authority and Language* (ed. Charlotte Methuen; Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research 12; Dudley: Peeters, 2004), 165.

⁷¹ Kamusiime, "Queen Mothers in the Old Testament," 155.

⁷² Kamusiime, "Queen Mothers in the Old Testament," 158-159, 162-164.

⁷³ Kamusiime, "Queen Mothers in the Old Testament," 164-166.

Babylon, and Persia.⁷⁴ From Judah, she discusses Maacah and Nehushta and their younger sons' accession to the throne even though the two sons had no legitimate claim.⁷⁵ Her conclusion is that the queen mother had no defined role. She was accorded a dignified station and limited privileges. If she attained any other position of significant political power, her own ambitions were the cause, such as the succession of her son to the throne.⁷⁶

In "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," Ben-Barak argues against scholarship's previous conclusions regarding the mother of the king because it drew on only a few instances of indirect evidence in the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁷ She analyzes the cases of Bathsheba, Maacah, Hamutal, and Nehushta, and finds the two characteristics in common:

(1) Each of these queens was the mother of a younger son who was without right to the succession, which legitimately belonged to an older brother. (2) They each succeeded in recruiting a powerful following of ambitious adherents who helped make it possible to place a younger son at the head of the kingdom, although this was in contradiction to accepted practice in regard to the royal succession.⁷⁸

Her final conclusion is much the same as in her previous article. No official political position existed for the queen mother or *gēbîrâ* and the only honor granted to her was that of being a mother. Her attainment of power was from individual occurrences, such as the

⁷⁴ Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur le Civilisations, 1987), 33-40.

⁷⁵ Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 37-38.

⁷⁶ Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 39-40.

⁷⁷ Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," *JBL* 110 (Spr 1991): 24.

⁷⁸ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 31.

achievement of the succession of her younger son, and these instances were rare, indicating that it was individual ambition rather than a general rule.⁷⁹

In *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, Hennie J. Marsman presents a history of research regarding the queen mother and then ultimately agrees with Ben-Barak that “the evidence to support the thesis that every מלכה held an office of state is quite meagre.”⁸⁰ She writes that not all queen mothers became a *gēbîrâ* but at least four queen mothers, whom she does not name, achieved considerable power.⁸¹ Marsman follows with examples of the queen mothers’ influence and political power through Bathsheba, Maacah, Hamutal, Athaliah, and Nehushta. As for a possible cultic role, she is willing to admit that the queen mother may have had a religious position but is quick to add that “the biblical evidence is too scarce to accept such far-reaching conclusions” as the ones Ahlström and Ackerman make.⁸²

Marsman does not address the question of whether the women she discusses are *gēbîrôt*; neither is she clear on whether the queen mother held any sanctioned position. She apparently uses the term “queen mother” to refer to the mother of the king rather than an actual role for the king’s mother. Marsman concludes with a cursory comment: “(T)he queen mother could wield considerable power, but it was power behind the

⁷⁹ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 34.

⁸⁰ Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 362.

⁸¹ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 362.

⁸² Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 366.

throne, granted by the king. On the other hand, she was the most powerful woman in the kingdom and had far more power than many men.”⁸³

Who is the Gēbîrâ?

Second to study of the queen mother’s historical roles, scholarship has argued over the definition of the term *gēbîrâ*. There are fifteen occurrences of *gēbîrâ* in the Hebrew Bible. These occurrences generally fall into three categories: the mother or wife of a ruler (1 Kgs 11:19; 15:13; 2 Kgs 10:13; 2 Chr 15:16; Jer 13:18; 29:2); a female ruler (Isa 47:5, 7); and a mistress corresponding to the term “master” (Gen 16:4, 8, 9; 2 Kgs 5:3; Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Isa 24:2).⁸⁴ Because it is used of three queen mothers, did it apply to *all* of the queen mothers? Did only particular mothers rise to the honorific title instead of receiving the appellative by virtue of their relationship to the king? Was it a term applied to the king’s primary wife? Many scholars, unfortunately, assume that every queen mother received the title by virtue of her position with no explanation as to their reasoning for awarding the title *en masse*.⁸⁵ As one can see from the above history of research with regards to the historical roles of the queen mothers, the determination of the role and place of the queen mother within the court is often intertwined with the definition of the *gēbîrâ*. In the following section, I will discuss three additional studies that attempt to define the term *gēbîrâ*. These studies are foundational for this

⁸³ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 370.

⁸⁴ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 23.

⁸⁵ See Ackerman, Pedersen, Ahlström, Andreasen, de Vaux, Ishida, Donner, Molin, Spanier, and Terrien.

dissertation's argument that the queen mother held a sanctioned position at court by virtue of being a *gēbîrâ*.

Carol Smith begins her article, "'Queenship' in Israel? The Cases of Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah," with an explanation of the social uses of the vocabulary attached to royal women.⁸⁶ Although *gēbîrâ* is widely accepted as meaning "queen mother," Smith argues that the word may not mean queen mother even when used in relation to the king. Genesis 16 uses the term for Sarah as a mistress of servants and 2 Kgs 5 for Naaman's wife as a woman in charge of a large household. The application of the term to queen mothers does not necessarily equate the term with "queen mother." The word may indicate instead the positions of power and authority broadly conceived that the women held. Smith does not rule out the possibility, however, that when the text uses *gēbîrâ*, it indicates a particular status.⁸⁷ She concludes: "However powerful and ambitious a woman might be, the fact that she was able to wield power effectively must reflect a position in the court that enabled her to do so. In other words, her power may well have derived originally from her position in the court, even though it was her own qualities that enabled her to wield it effectively."⁸⁸

Nancy R. Bowen examines the "methodological issues regarding the ways in which the evidence of the biblical literature is used to justify or substantiate the various claims made with regard to the *gēbîrâ*" in "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Carol Smith, "'Queenship' in Israel? The Cases of Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceeding of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 142-162.

⁸⁷ Smith, "'Queenship' in Israel?," 144.

⁸⁸ Smith, "'Queenship' in Israel?," 146.

⁸⁹ Nancy R. Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," *CBQ* 63, 4 (Oct 2001): 597.

Removing “queen mother” from the definition of *gēbîrâ* and using “great lady” or “principal lady” as the translation “is more consonant with the root meaning and would shift the focus away from her alleged standing as ‘mother’ and toward her royal standing as a royal woman of high rank.”⁹⁰ According to Bowen, because the regnal formulas never link *gēbîrâ* with the mother of the king, the *gēbîrâ* as queen mother and the mother of the king were not identical.⁹¹ Also, when 1 and 2 Kings directly uses the term for a Judean woman, Maacah (1 Kgs 15: 13), it is not equated with the biological mother of the king, as she is presumably Asa’s grandmother (see 1 Kgs 15:1-2, 8-10).⁹² In the other usage of the title by the same redactor (1 Kgs 10:13), Bowen argues that the text uses the term for the king’s wife, as the Judeans seeking her are doing so in order to determine the succession of the northern monarchy from the deceased king to his son, not to hold court with the deceased’s mother.⁹³ Bowen concludes that “queen mother” should be abandoned and “great lady” or “principal lady” used because *gēbîrâ* can encompass other relationships to the king, such as wife and grandmother.⁹⁴

Patricia J. Berlyn differs from Smith and Bowen in that she equates the *gēbîrâ* with all of the queen mothers. Berlyn does not address the “common” or “technical” usage of “mistress” and states that the title was a rank of pre-eminence. Because the text refers to a foreign queen as *gēbîrâ* (1 Kg 11:19), however, Berlyn writes that the term

⁹⁰Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 598. De Vaux suggests that, due to the variant meanings—none of which he disputes, the term should be rendered Great Lady (*Ancient Israel*, 117).

⁹¹ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 600.

⁹² Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 598-599, 608-609.

⁹³ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 611-612.

⁹⁴ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 618.

“connotes the woman who was foremost by the protocol of her own country.”⁹⁵ For the Judean writer, the highest lady of Egypt (1 Kg 11:19) was the Pharaoh’s Great Wife. In Judah, however, the wife of the king never ruled as a queen, a monarch; she was only a consort. Therefore, the one who was considered the foremost woman in the land, and for which the title was reserved, was the mother of the king.⁹⁶ While Berlyn uses the regnal formulas as well in her conclusion, her equation of the *gēbîrâ* with all the queen mothers is the result of a determination of what the title itself means.

Lasting Legacy: Regnal Formulas

While scholarship is sparse in regards to the queen mother and the regnal formulas, the following section will focus on the available literature, even though most of the discussions fall within the works of the authors mentioned above. Most scholars who mention the place of the queen mother in the formulas do so in passing or posit a brief unfounded possibility for her name appearing in all but two formulas for Judah. Andreasen and de Vaux briefly mention that the appearance of the queen mother in the formulas for Judah, as opposed to their absence for the north, demonstrates a dynastic stability not usually found in the northern kingdom.⁹⁷ Ben-Barak is more tentative in her conclusion but writes that the redactor’s intervention in the formulas demonstrates

⁹⁵ Patricia J. Berlyn, “The Great Ladies,” *JBQ* 24, 1 (Jan-Mar 1996), 26. See also, Solvang, *Woman’s Place is in the House*, 73.

⁹⁶ Berlyn, “The Great Ladies,” 26

⁹⁷ Andreasen, “Role of the Queen Mother,” 180; and de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 118.

“solemnity” in the Judean kings’ succession perhaps in order to stress an uninterrupted dynastic continuity.⁹⁸

Leila Leah Bronner’s conclusions are similar but she develops the theory a step further in saying that the naming of the queen mother is an attempt to establish and defend the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty’s claim to rule over all Israel.⁹⁹ She states that every legitimate son had to have an identifiable mother. Where the queen mother does not appear for two Judean kings, her speculation is that they were so evil, “their mothers’ anonymity is due to the kings’ infamy.”¹⁰⁰ She undercuts her argument by admitting that Manasseh’s mother is named and the rule is not followed with complete consistency.¹⁰¹ In addition, Bronner briefly states that the juxtaposition of the queen mother with her son’s evaluation reflects her role in his life and at court.¹⁰²

Nadav Na’aman is unique in positing that the text records the name of the queen mother in order for her name to be read aloud during the annual ceremony for the royal ancestors.¹⁰³ Since the Hittite culture made such a large impact on the ancient Israelites, it would be natural that the Judean monarchy reflected the Hittite monarchy, in which the queen retained her status as a dowager-queen (*tawananna*) after her royal husband’s

⁹⁸ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 24.

⁹⁹ Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University of America, 2004), 49.

¹⁰⁰ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 49.

¹⁰¹ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 49.

¹⁰² Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 48.

¹⁰³ Nadav Na’aman, “Queen Mothers and Ancestors Cult in Judah in the First Temple Period,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien Zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und Seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu einem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ingo Kottsieper, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Jakob Wöhrle; AOAT 350; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 479-490.

death.¹⁰⁴ According to Na'aman, the king list was instrumental in the cult of ancestors and the ancient Israelites must have held their own ancestral ceremonies. The king list of Judah, thus, serves as the necessary roll-call for these ceremonies.¹⁰⁵

Shoshanna Bin-Nun hypothesizes that the lack or difference in the regnal formulas between northern and southern monarchies is a result of the absence or change in sources and not the decision of the author or a later omission. Bin-Nun cites the lack of the name of the king's mother for the north and the occasional lack of the father's name or the king's burial place.¹⁰⁶ Tomoo Ishida specifically states that the absence of the queen mother's name for the northern kingdom in the formulas seems to be due to shortcomings in sources rather than the absence of the office.¹⁰⁷

Also in reference to the unnamed queen mothers, Solvang writes that other sources such as the annals may have been consulted for Judah rather than the editor(s) forgetting the mothers' names.¹⁰⁸ She argues against the naming of the queen mother as legitimization of the new king since information such as the birth order of the son and the status of the mother prior to her becoming queen mother is not addressed.¹⁰⁹ She also argues against the queen mother's name as a sign of the continuance of the Davidic monarchy as continuity can be conveyed without her identification through the king's

¹⁰⁴ Na'aman, "Queen Mothers and Ancestors Cult," 482-483.

¹⁰⁵ Na'aman, "Queen Mothers and Ancestors Cult," 482-482, 486.

¹⁰⁶ Shoshanna Bin-Nun, "Formulas From Royal Records of Israel and Of Judah," *VT* 18 (1968), 422.

¹⁰⁷ Ishida, *Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel*, 157. Otto Eissfeldt does not specifically refer to the queen mother but also states that the author consulted different sources for the formulas of the north than for Judah (*The Old Testament, An Introduction: The History of the Format of the Old Testament* [trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 282-286).

¹⁰⁸ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 80.

father.¹¹⁰ Her conclusion is that the inclusion of the queen mother in the formulas is a result of the narrator focusing upon the “house” or Davidic dynasty. Solvang writes: “It presents those who headed the royal household in one generation and may suggest their influence on the new generation . . . The father and the mother of the new king represent political connections, alliances and influences that come into the new reign from the prior one.”¹¹¹

Bowen offers the most sustained work on the queen mother’s appearance in the regnal formulas in that she devotes two and a half pages of her article to the topic. She first posits the idea that the mother of the king should possibly be connected with the religious evaluation of the king that follows her naming in the formula. She states that for every king who receives a negative evaluation, his mother is not named or “is in some way problematic by Deuteronomistic standards,” i.e, Rehoboam’s mother is an Ammonite.¹¹² As for the kings given qualified or complete approval, the mothers are from Jerusalem or the Judean provinces. Bowen asks: “What if, then, the concern for the mother of the Judean (only) king is in part a reflex of the Deuteronomistic critique of Solomon and foreign wives?”¹¹³ After Josiah, all the kings receive a negative evaluation despite the origins of their mother, which, Bowen argues, serves the Deuteronomistic agenda of justifying the destruction of Judah because of the sins of Manasseh.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 83.

¹¹¹ Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 84.

¹¹² Bowen, “Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 602.

¹¹³ Bowen, “Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 602

¹¹⁴ Bowen, “Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 602.

Bowen also discusses the position of the queen mother's name, which appears at the point when a king assumes the throne. For Bowen, this placement may be due to the need to determine legitimacy dependent on the status and rank of the mother; if the wives are ranked, then the children of the highest or favorite wife are eligible for succession.¹¹⁵ Also, she demonstrates that when the people of the land intervene in the succession of a king, they choose a king whose mother is Judean. Therefore, the information regarding the queen mother in the formulas serves to legitimate the choice of the king by that particular group of people.¹¹⁶

Purpose and Significance

Several problems exist with the scholarship above for the study of the queen mother. The previous works have focused on the historical investigation of the queen mother with little literary or theological study. When previous scholars focus on the three roles for the queen mother—social, political, and religious—along with the idea she had no role, they argue for a historical basis of their theories. Using the history of the ancient Near East, parallel roles in the surrounding nations, and what is available in the Scriptures, scholars have employed historical-critical methods to “uncover” who the queen mother was. What analysis is spent on the narratives of the individual queen mothers is to further a historical end. As for theology, a few scholars have briefly connected the queen mother's naming in the formulas to the theology of the formulas but have not included the narratives to support their argument. Scholars have yet to connect

¹¹⁵ Bowen, “Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 603.

¹¹⁶ Bowen, “Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 604.

the portrayal of the queen mothers in the narrative with the regnal formulas and the overall crafting of theology through the intertwining of narrative and the formulas.

The theories of dynastic stability (Anderson, de Vaux, Ben-Barak), the defense of the legitimacy of the Davidic claim to the throne of Israel (Ben-Barak, Bronner), and the determination of the legitimacy of the successor (Bronner) are problematic in that both can be confirmed through the patrilineage of the king and so the name of the mother is unnecessary. Succession of the newly crowned king is overtly connected to his father or his brother, in which case, the brother's familial relationship to their father is emphasized. As for Davidic claimants, a new king's legitimacy as a Davidic descendant is traced through his father with no regard to the lineage of his mother. There is little evidence from the text that the mother had an official role in the naming of the successor, only indirect or wily influence. The preservation of the queen mother's name as part of the king list to be read during ceremonies for the cult of ancestors (Na'aman) has many difficulties: the ancient Israelites' adoption of the practice of annual rites for ancestors is entirely speculative; the Hittites did not record the name of the king's mother in their king lists; not every mother of the Hittite king rose to the position of *tawannana* reserved for his mother; and the theory of the king list does not explain why the northern kingdom did not record the queen mother's name. One of the theories with merit is that the redactor(s) of 1 and 2 Kings consulted different sources for information about the northern and southern kingdoms and, therefore, the result is the naming of the queen mother for Judah but not for the north (Bin-Nun, Ishida, Solvang). This argument can neither be confirmed nor discounted but it remains in the realm of form-critical and

redactional studies. This argument also does not take into account the theological and narrative crafting of both the formulas and the narrative.

I propose to include in my study both the regnal formulas and the narratives in which the queen mother appears and to investigate both formulas and narratives largely through a literary lens in order to determine their theological meaning. Solvang and Bowen begin to move in this direction. Solvang states that the naming of both the son and the mother suggests her influence upon the new king.¹¹⁷ Bowen posits that the naming of the queen mother should possibly be connected with the religious evaluation of the king, as the kings with Judean mothers receive complete or qualified approval until after Josiah.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, only three examples (Joash, Amaziah, Azariah) prior to Josiah support her theory with four other kings receiving complete or qualified approval without the mention of the queen mother's familial heritage (Asa, Jehhoshaphat, Jotham, Hezekiah). Also, under Bowen's theory, the queen mother does not factor into the evaluations of the kings after Josiah. Both Solvang and Bowen fall short of a comprehensive study of the influence of the institution of the queen mother upon the monarchy as a whole. Solvang does not extend the influence of the queen mother beyond the next generation, focusing upon the influence of each individual queen mother to the new king. Bowen's theory ends with Josiah and does not incorporate the remaining kings of Judah. Neither makes use of the narratives to support their position.

My study of the role of the queen mother is not so much concerned with her historical function but with the role her presence plays within the narrative of 1 and 2 Kings, both formulaic and literary. While the connection of the queen mother to the

¹¹⁷ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 84.

¹¹⁸ Bowen, "Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 602-604.

deuteronomistic evaluation is not unique, my study is significant in that I argue that evaluation of the regnal formulas is also connected to the influence of the queen mother upon her son the king. This influence is demonstrated in the narrative of 1 and 2 Kings as well as the *mythos* (or stereotypical expectation) surrounding the queen mother of the divided monarchy, which is not due to her Judean or foreign locations alone. The presence of the queen mother throughout the Judean monarchy is, therefore, an articulation of a theological construct of the monarchy.

Methodology

The methodology I propose to use consists mainly of a literary and narrative perspective. I will also incorporate methodological pluralism, which includes a comparative approach, form criticism, intertextuality, and a theological approach.¹¹⁹ These multiple approaches converge to present a holistic picture of the text's depiction of the official position of queen mother both in the narrative and the regnal formulas. This convergence determines that a *mythos* surrounded the queen mother of the divided monarchy, which is that the position as a whole and the women who filled it contributed to the downfall of the nation and the subsequent exile.

I will use a comparative approach, examining ancient Near Eastern texts about queen mothers in ancient Israel's neighbors in order to establish the viability of such a position in ancient Israel. There is no extrabiblical evidence available to determine clearly the monarchical position of the queen mother within ancient Israel. By exploring

¹¹⁹ Narrative criticism, as discussed below, is the main method that I will employ. One should note with Richard G. Bowman states that no single method will adequately aid the reader in a comprehensive interpretation of the passage ("Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Gale A. Yee; 2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 20).

the records of the neighboring ancient Near East, one can establish the place of the queen mother among ancient Israel's neighbors, supporting the role of the queen mother as a sanctioned court position in Judah.

Using past scholarship as a foundation, I will consider the regnal formulas in a form-critical manner to discuss their purpose and determine the queen mother's possible place in them. The form-critical method has substantially dissected the regnal formulas. My intent is to draw on that scholarship, especially as it pertains to delineating the possible theological function that the formulas perform. From this foundation, I will determine how the addition of the name of the king's mother specifically enhances the formulas and theological evaluations and how the passages within the formulas give insight into the import of those additions. I am not concerned with determining the *Sitz im Leben* of the formulas themselves but rather where the name of the queen mother fits into the theological meaning of the formulas.¹²⁰ As opposed to form criticism, which focuses on the role that the patterns of language or forms "play in giving shape and expression to the text,"¹²¹ my aim is determine how the *naming of the queen mother* reflects the purpose and meaning of the text.

I will examine the narratives in 1 and 2 Kings that pertain to the queen mother through a literary critical lens.¹²² My intent is to read them as a narrative product in order

¹²⁰ John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis* (rev ed.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 83; and Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology* (trans. James D. Nogalski; 2d ed.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 97.

¹²¹ Marvin A. Sweeney, "Form Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; rev and expanded ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 58.

¹²² For examples, see Bowman, "Narrative Criticism," 19-45; Cheryl J. Exum and David J. A. Clines, "The New Literary Criticism," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Cheryl J.

to determine how the character of the queen mother functions in the text.¹²³ I will follow a similar method to Robert Alter's as demonstrated in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.¹²⁴ This method presupposes a synchronic approach as it focuses upon the narrative rather than the historical aspects of the narrative's creation. Alter specifically subscribes to the notion that the biblical narrative is "fictionalized history," especially with regards to the books of Judges and Kings.¹²⁵ Alter writes: "The point of that fiction was the principal means which the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history."¹²⁶

Even though this method is synchronic and focuses on the narrative, Alter also acknowledges the text's composite artistry: "what we actually have is a constant stitching together of earlier texts drawn from divergent literary and sometimes oral traditions, with minor or major interventions by later editors in the form of glosses, connecting passages, confluences of sources, and so forth."¹²⁷ The present biblical narrative is the process of what Alter calls an editorial creation and the combination of different sources in a final stage to produce a comprehensive vision.¹²⁸ This method, therefore, focuses upon the present text as the resulting, canonized narrative, rather than dissecting the various layers and sources of the text.

Exum and David J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 143; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 11-25; and Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 73-82.

¹²³ Literary criticism used here is not to be confused with *Literarkritik*, historical-literary criticism that is diachronic and often translated as "source criticism." For an extended explanation of *Literarkritik*, see Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 47-61.

¹²⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

¹²⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 25.

¹²⁶ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 32.

¹²⁷ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 132.

¹²⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 133.

Given the reasons described above, I will refer to a narrator rather than author(s), editor(s), or compiler(s). The books of Kings, for example, show evidence of multiple authors and, probably, multiple compilers, involving several recensions. The books are the final product that is the result of many hands to produce the final stage canonized as Scripture. Narrative criticism, as mentioned above, does not deny this process; yet, the text itself presents a single voice that tells the story. Whether this voice is coherent is not the debate; what is important is that an entity must relate the story, whether it be only a passage regarding a queen mother or 1 and 2 Kings. I will refer to this entity as the narrator per narrative criticism. For this dissertation, the narrator is the voiced entity who relates the story of a biblical book. I will, therefore, speak of the narrator of the books of 1 and Kings or the narrator of the book of Ezekiel.

Distinguishing the narrator of a text requires the identification of the text and the narrative. The text refers to the passages that one defines as a coherent whole. For instance, the text is the pericope that begins relating Athaliah's story in 2 Kgs 11:1 and continues until the final judgment upon her reign in 2 Kgs 11:21. The narrative, then, is the medium through which the narrator relates the rulership of Athaliah. The use of "narrative" does not solely involve the individual pericopes but also relates to the entire narrative of a biblical book. The entire book of 1 and 2 Kings is a narrative composed of many individual narratives. The Hebrew Bible, then, is composed of multiple narratives through the multiple books in order to recount the overarching narrative of the history of ancient Israel. The narrator of 1 and 2 Kings relates the overall narrative of the monarchy's history beginning with Solomon to the fall of Judah, all of which involves individual narratives regarding the queen mother. Formulas or the headings to poems, for

example, are also part of the narrative as the narrator uses this information as if they are narrative asides that help explicate a passage's meaning, giving direction to the reader on how to read the passage or the overall narrative of the book.

I will adhere to the main tenets of narrative criticism, as outlined by Alter and others, such as Richard G. Bowman and John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay. Bowman describes the three basic presuppositions of narrative criticism: (1) the final form of the text that we have available is a coherent narrative; (2) the narrative coherently stands apart from its compositional history and the agenda of a reader's interpretation; and (3) by analyzing the literary features of the narrative, the text reveals an interpretive focus.¹²⁹ From the standpoint of these presuppositions, the critic then asks questions of the text that are concerned with "how the general elements of narrative are manifested in a particular narrative to yield a meaningful and meaning-filled story."¹³⁰

Hayes and Holladay offer additional insight into the narrative-critical process that will prove instrumental to my study. As I will consider the whole of the Hebrew Bible to determine an ancient Israelite notion of the queen mother, narrative criticism recognizes that the individual parts of the narrative are a part of a larger whole. The individual narratives contribute to the meaning of the whole document and derive meaning from the entirety of the whole.¹³¹ In considering the function of a particular passage, Hayes and Holladay put forth the interpretive question of what the effect would be on the whole

¹²⁹ Bowman, "Narrative Criticism," 19.

¹³⁰ Bowman, "Narrative Criticism," 19.

¹³¹ Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 75.

document if the passage was omitted from the text.¹³² This question fuels my analysis of the queen mothers who appear in the book of Kings. The formulas not only give rise to the place of the queen mother in the theological structure of the books, but they also serve as a narrative lens through which to read the smaller pericopes. The narrative analysis of the individual queen mothers, in turn, serves that overall structure and theological function of the formulas.

I will also include a comparison of the queen mothers who appear outside 1 and 2 Kings (Jer 13:18; 22:24-27; 29:2; Ezek 19:1-10; Prov 31:1-9; Dan 5:10-12) in order to show a distinct difference in how the texts portrays the women and to demonstrate a particular *mythos* surrounding the queen mother. I will first approach these passages with the same literary method as described above and then I will adopt an intertextual approach.

According to Timothy K. Beal, intertextuality involves the “total and limitless fabric of text which constitutes our linguistic universe.”¹³³ According to Patricia K. Tull, intertextuality engages the multiple available narratives to determine a shared meaning or web of association through interconnections among texts.¹³⁴ She states that when texts are treated in isolation, they are “truncated and incomplete.”¹³⁵ Danna Nolan Fewell

¹³² Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 78.

¹³³ Timothy K. Beal, “Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 27.

¹³⁴ Patricia K. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; rev and expanded ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 165.

¹³⁵ Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” 166.

agrees when she states that “no text exists in a vacuum.”¹³⁶ A narrative is not a lone voice but is in dialogue with other voices in the text as a whole. For Fewell, similarities in texts invite conversation and the differences allow the texts to be affected by each other.¹³⁷ Intertextuality relates to my study by linking the similarities and differences of the text in which a queen mother or the term *gēbîrâ* appears.¹³⁸ These texts, therefore, point to a *mythos* or stereotype of the queen mother in the whole of the Hebrew Bible.¹³⁹

The results from this mainly literary method allow for movement into a theological approach. Determining the theological meaning of the naming of the queen mothers and their inclusion in the narratives is my ultimate goal. These texts in which the queen mother is named or appears are theological in nature by virtue of their appearance in 1 and 2 Kings but also, simply, because they are biblical texts. According to Rolf Knierim, biblical texts are inherently theological in nature and would not exist without this nature.¹⁴⁰ Yet, according to John McKenzie, biblical theology is “the only discipline or sub-discipline in the field of theology that lacks generally accepted

¹³⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell, “Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 17.

¹³⁷ Fewell, “Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating,” 12-13.

¹³⁸ Peter D. Miscall argues that the possible relations established between texts can be based on such relationships as quotes, direct reference, indirect allusions, common words and letters, and dependence on language (“Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* [ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992], 44).

¹³⁹ While Brueggemann specifically focuses upon Old Testament theology in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, he uses an intertextual approach to formulate a comprehensive view of such theological issues as the hiddenness of Yahweh, Israel as Yahweh’s partner, and the mediating presence of Yahweh (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997]).

¹⁴⁰ Rolf P. Knierim, “On the Task of Old Testament Theology,” in *A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form and Content: Essays in Honor of George W. Coats* (ed. Eugene E. Carpenter; JSOTSup 240; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 155.

principles, methods, and structure. There is not even a general definition of its purpose and scope.”¹⁴¹

Perhaps the best way to approach a theological method, then, is by addressing Claus Westermann’s question, “What does the Old Testament say about God?”¹⁴² While speaking specifically of the Jacob-Esau cycle, Alter adds another question that one can apply to the historical narrative: “What is one to make of this vivid fictional realization of the scene in regard to its evident national-historical signification?”¹⁴³ Gerhard Hasel sums up the task of theological interpretation by asking what the text means.¹⁴⁴ My approach, therefore, endeavors to answer these questions with regards to the books of Kings. In doing so, I will include a study of the narrator’s theological perspective and view of the monarchy in 1 and 2 Kings. I will then bring together all of the above considerations in order to determine the theological import of the naming of the queen mother in the formulas and the inclusion of the texts that feature the queen mother. The intent is not to uncover the theology regarding the monarchy’s covenant in/fidelity in 1 and 2 Kings but to place the queen mother’s appearances within the context of that theology.

¹⁴¹ John L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 15. See the following for examples and for a more comprehensive history of scholarship regarding theological approaches to the Hebrew Bible: Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1-114; Ronald E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991); John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); and Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 72-93.

¹⁴² Claus Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say About God?* (ed. Friedemann W. Golka; Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 11; and Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (trans. Douglas W. Stott; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 9.

¹⁴³ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 45.

¹⁴⁴ Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 30.

Overview of the Study

In this study, I will determine that the presence of the queen mother of the Judean monarchy in the regnal formulas and in the narration of three king's reigns in 1 and 2 Kings establishes the queen mother's function in the theological agenda of the narrative of 1 and 2 Kings. The following is an overview of how this study will proceed.

The second chapter will address the question of whether or not the position of queen mother is an official role within the court as depicted in the Hebrew Bible and specifically the books of Kings. While several studies on the topic have been undertaken, I will make the case that the king's mother held a sanctioned role in order for her to be involved in the kingdom's welfare to the extent that the narrator finds her culpable for the exile. First, I will include a comparison with ancient Near Eastern queen mothers. Of particular interest are the Egyptian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Assyrian, Sumerian, and Sidonian queen mothers. The focus is to highlight the distinctive yet similar qualities of the queen mother of the divided monarchy with the ones in ancient Near Eastern literature. The similarities present a basis for affirming the possibility of the sanctioned roles and official court position of the portrayal of the queen mother in the Hebrew Bible. Second, this chapter will include a discussion of the ancient Israelites' demand for "a king like the nations" in 1 Sam 8:19-20. If the ancient Israelites were seeking a ruler similar to those of the surrounding nations, then that desire possibly extends the rulership to the entire royal court, including the queen mother. Last, I will make the case for an official, court-sanctioned position for the queen mother by addressing who the *gēbîrâ* is. The *gēbîrâ* is the first lady of the household, here the kingdom of Judah; therefore, each queen mother is a *gēbîrâ*.

Chapter three will investigate the monarchy as a whole. Of importance here is demonstrating how the text of 1 and 2 Kings presents a theodicy of the exile. The monarchy in general is faulted for the punishment of exile for ancient Israel. The narrator carefully works the narrative in order to denounce theologically the various kings' actions and lay blame at their feet. This chapter will include a brief history of the topic in order to produce a foundation for the theodicy of the exile. Also, I will address the regnal formulas in general in 1 and 2 Kings and their function in establishing this theodicy.

Chapters four and five will consider the numerous queen mothers who appear in the Hebrew Bible. The fourth chapter will discuss, first, the regnal formulas as they pertain specifically to the role of the queen mothers. Second, it will present a cursory summary of various functions of the queen mothers appearing in the divided monarchy. The mothers and the primary texts are as follows: Maacah (1 Kgs 15), Athaliah (2 Kgs 9), Jezebel (2 Kgs 11), Nehushta (2 Kgs 24), and Hamutal (Ezek 19). I will consider parallel texts in Chronicles and additional passages occurring outside of 1 and 2 Kings, such as with Nehushta (Jer 13, 22, 29) and Hamutal (Ezek 19), to establish the narrator's view of the position of the queen mother. How these women functioned historically is not the primary concern but cannot be ignored as their historical actions spurred the narrator's recasting of events to function within the narrator's agenda. The fifth chapter will address, first, the queen mothers who appear outside of the divided monarchy: Bathsheba (2 Kgs 1-2), Lemuel's mother (Prov 31:1-9), and Belshazzar's mother (Dan 5:10). In addition, I will demonstrate how one can consider Sarah (Gen 15-21) an "ancestral queen mother" due to the text's use of *gēbîrâ* to describe her, tying her to the queen mothers. Sarah struggles to secure her son's inheritance and remain as the

preeminent woman of her household in the same manner that other *gēbîrôt* are involved in the succession of their sons and, by virtue of that succession, become the preeminent women of the kingdom.

With the establishment of the numerous queen mothers in the text, the viability of their positions, and the theological nature of 1 and 2 Kings, I will demonstrate a disconnect between the queen mothers of the divided monarchy and the queen mothers appearing elsewhere. The queen mothers who are not of the divided monarchy include Sarah, Bathsheba, Lemuel's mother, and Belshazzar's mother. These women are models; they are "good queen mothers." The women of the regnal formulas are Maacah, Athaliah, Jezebel, Nehushta, and Hamutal. These women act in ways similar to the kings to whom the narrator gives a negative or qualified evaluation. Those actions include, among other things I will discuss, promulgation of foreign worship and the murder of innocent people. The texts appearing outside of 1 and 2 Kings are instrumental in that they present a mythos surrounding the queen mother: the queen mothers of the divided monarchy are "bad queen mothers" and the others are "good queen mothers." Just as the kings on the whole are responsible for the downfall of the nation, so the queen mothers on the whole are culpable as well.

The final chapter will draw the findings of the dissertation together. The actions of the kings are to blame for the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms and, yet, the queen mothers of the divided monarchy act in a similar manner. Based upon comparison with queen mothers appearing outside of the divided monarchy, the women of 1 and 2 Kings exemplify a presence or behavior that the narrator considers detrimental to the kingdom whereas the other queen mothers are models of how the mother of the king

should act. The text names almost all of the queen mothers in the regnal formulas for the Judean kings just as they name the kings themselves. As the most powerful male in the kingdom is targeted for blame, so is the most powerful female. The narrator, therefore, includes the queen mother in presenting a theological perspective on the monarchy. The queen mother, as viewed by the narrator, exerts the power and influence of her position in such a way that the narrator also faults the queen mother along with the king for the exile of Judah.

CHAPTER TWO

The Legitimacy of the Formal Position of “Queen Mother”

The naming of the mother of the king in the regnal formulas in 1 and 2 Kings suggests that the queen mother was highly important to the monarchy and to the narrator. Interpreting the inclusion of her name as simply a method of recordkeeping does not answer what the importance of the *mother's* name means for the record. The narrator does not choose to name the mothers of the northern kingdom. An even more glaring difference is that no other ancient Near Eastern monarchic record names the king's mother (or the occasional queen and queen-regent) in such a systematic fashion. One cannot, however, assume solely from the regnal formulas that the Judean queen mother held a court-sanctioned role or that the position is even an official role for the biological mother of the king rather than an honor or acknowledgment of her biological role. While the regnal formulas are an integral aspect of the argument for an official role within the court, additional arguments are necessary to establish a clearer case for the viability of the formal position of the queen mother. The mother of the king functions as more than a mother in a family that happens to be a royal one. Functioning in sanctioned roles, the queen mothers' actions in the divided monarchy capture the attention of the narrator to the extent that the narrator presents the queen mothers in the narrative as targets of blame for the exile.

To establish the notion of a sanctioned position, this chapter will investigate three aspects that will strengthen such an argument. The first section is a presentation of ancient Near Eastern queen mothers. The establishment of the roles and positions of the

queen mothers in the surrounding nations confirms the viability for the position of the ancient Israelite queen mother. The second aspect considered is the ancient Israelites' request for "a king like the nations" in 1 Sam 8:19-20. The decision to implement a king with functions similar to the surrounding kingdoms opens an avenue in which this new monarchical structure and administration can reflect a rulership inclusive of the entirety of a royal court. The chapter will conclude with an investigation into the Hebrew text's use of *gēbîrâ* to refer to the queen mothers of the divided monarchy. This discussion will establish that the text perceives the *gēbîrâ* as the first lady of a household or kingdom, particularly with reference to the first lady of Judah, the queen mother. The regnal formulas are not included here as I will investigate them more in depth in chapters three and four with a particular concern for the queen mother's appearance in them. This chapter assumes that the naming of the king's mother in the regnal formulas leads readers to identify the queen mother's importance in the Judean court, possibly in a sanctioned role, given that the narrator establishes two personages in the succession formulae—the king and his mother.

The Queen Mother of the Nations

A cursory investigation of women in the ancient Near East reveals that the queen mothers in ancient Israel are not the only queen mothers in the ancient Near Eastern monarchies nor are they the only ones to have functioned in cultic, social, and administrative roles. Of particular interest are the Assyrian, Babylonian, Eblaite, Egyptian, Elamite, Hittite, Sidonian, Sumerian, and Ugaritic queen mothers. I will detail the available information regarding the roles these women played within their respective kingdoms. The position and actions of these ancient Near Eastern queen mothers inform

and give a basis for understanding the actions of queen mothers in the Hebrew narrative. As we have no extrabiblical evidence of the ancient Israelite queen mothers or their position, the queen mothers of the ancient Near East lend credence to the position of the ancient Israelite queen mothers presented in the text.

The Queen Mother of Assyria

The evidence available regarding queen mothers in Assyria spans roughly three hundred years and is confined solely to the Neo-Assyrian period (911-612 BCE).¹ While the queen mother was honored as the wife of the king, in effect a queen to her husband-king, she was more honored as mother than as wife.² If she lived to see the succession of her son, the crown-prince, then she became known as the queen mother of the reigning king. Titled with the term *ummi šarri* (“queen mother”), she served in an honored and powerful position.³ She also held the title *palēša*, which is a combination of *palû* and the

¹ The queen mothers of the Neo-Assyrian period, along with several queen mothers from other ancient Near Eastern nations as detailed in this chapter, are contemporaries with the ancient Israelite queen mother or even appear after the end of the southern kingdom. These queen mothers postdate the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, raising the question of their inclusion in a comparison between ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite queen mothers. Three rebuttals answer this problem. 1) Even though the extant material regarding the ancient Near Eastern queen mothers does not appear prior to the Israelite monarchy, the appearance of queen mothers archaeologically and literarily does not negate that the position could have existed prior to the extant information and that the position was perpetuated throughout the centuries. In other words, silence from history does not determine the absence of the position. 2) The ancient Near Eastern queen mothers are contemporaries of the Israelite queen mother, allowing for the influence of these neighboring nations upon the ancient Israelite monarchy. The text records numerous interactions with the Israelites’ Near Eastern neighbors. 3) The final form of the books of 1 and 2 Kings coalesced during the exilic period. This late date allows for the narrator to impose a personal viewpoint of the position of the queen mother upon these women who appear in the text. One should not relegate the narrator’s knowledge and the influence of the surrounding nations to the purview of the divided monarchies alone.

² Henri Cazelles, “La mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” *Maria et Ecclesia* 5 (1959): 41.

³ Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Lund: Gleerup, 1963), 65; and Amelie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC, vol. 2* (London: Routledge, 1995), 528.

suffix *-ša*.⁴ *Palû* is a reference to authority or a period of office and may also denote divinity or royalty and its usage is found only in connection to divine beings and royal peoples.⁵ Royal members of the monarchy other than the queen mother could also hold the title.

Describing the importance of the queen mother at court, Elisabeth Meier Tetlow writes that, despite the male control of the monarchy and predominantly male control of the administration of the state, “the king’s wives and palace women had to please both the king and his mother.”⁶ When court ceremonies list the royal household, the queen mother is named after the king and his brother; the king’s wives are then listed.⁷ The queen mother held her own administration at court with numerous officials and personnel beneath her, including eunuchs, bodyguards, chariot drivers, and her own troops. She also received her own share from taxes and tribute.⁸ She owned broad areas of land, extensive enough to require estate managers, secretaries, guards, troops, and agricultural laborers. The king, her son, involved himself in her estate by personally selecting some of her staff. These estates provided her with additional income, making her an independently wealthy individual and requiring her own treasurers and managers of her

⁴ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65; and Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society: Volume 1: The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 288 n99. Naqi’a and one of Assurbanipal’s wives, Aššur-šarrat, used this term.

⁵ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 66.

⁶ Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 151.

⁷ Ilse Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Abner Schram, 1974), 42.

⁸ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65; Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 151; and Georg Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” *TZ* 10 (1970): 169. Tetlow describes one queen mother as having her own confectioner (Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 151).

property.⁹ This section will discuss three particular queen mothers in detail and their place in the Assyrian monarchy: Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, Sammu-ramāt, and Naqi'a.

The queen mother that we have the least evidence regarding is Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua, the wife of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE) and mother of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BCE). The excavation of tombs under the royal palace at Nimrud unearthed her sarcophagus and ones for three other queens. Mullissu-mukannishat-Ninua holds the distinction among the four women as being listed as the wife of a king *and* the mother of a subsequent king. Her honor was such that she was buried with a gold crown, jewelry with precious stones, and ivory figurines.¹⁰

Sammu-ramāt was the wife of Šamaši-Adad V (824-811/810 BCE) and the mother of Adad-nirari III (811/810-783/782 BCE).¹¹ She was possibly the foundation for the Semiramis legends, a mythical queen of Assyria for whom the Hanging Gardens of

⁹ Ivan Starr, Jussi Aro, and Simo Parpola, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1990), no. 151; and Theodore Kwasman and Simo Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I: Tiglath-pileser III through Esarhaddon* (SAA 6; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1991), nos. 253, 254, 255, 256. See also, Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 528; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 169; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 151. The queen mother, on more than one occasion, sent horses to the king, accompanied by letters from her treasurer.

¹⁰ Joan Oates and David Oates, *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq/The British Academy, 2001), 82-86, pl. 4-8. See also, Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 147-148.

¹¹ Zafrira Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 35; Herbert Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August 1958 gewidmet* (ed. Richard von Kienle et al; Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), 110-111; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 169; and Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 44.

Babylon were supposedly built.¹² Most scholars agree that Adad-nirari was a minor at the time of his succession and that Sammu-ramāt served as his regent during the first four or five years of his reign.¹³ She never received the title of “Queen of Assyria” and remained as the “Royal Wife of Šamaši-Adad,” which stresses her regency.¹⁴

Sammu-ramāt holds the distinction of being named with her son on a stele erected on the border between two vassal kingdoms. The boundary stone states that she rode out with her son, crossing the Euphrates River, to where he battled to defend the vassal states.¹⁵ Of the stelae of the Assyrian kings, she is the only female to be named.¹⁶ The district governor of the vassal states dedicated two statues in a temple to commemorate the life of the king and the life of Sammu-ramāt.¹⁷ Nowhere are her deeds detailed and no reason is truly known for her prominence and the honor she received. She was so

¹² Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 362; Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 169; and Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 44. Diodorus wrote Semiramis’ biography and Herodotus included additional details regarding her life in his histories.

¹³ Ben-Barak, “The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne,” 35; Hildegard Lewy, “Nitokris-Naqia,” *JNES* 11, 4 (Oct 1952): 264-265; Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 169; and Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 44.

¹⁴ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 347. See also, Moshe Weinfeld, “Semiramis: Her Name and Her Origin,” in *Ah, Assyria... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor* (ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph’al; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 99-103.

Kuhr and Schramm disagree with her regency, claiming a misunderstanding of textual evidence and that there is no reason for the assumption that Adad-nirari was still a minor when he succeeded to the throne (Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 491; and Wolfgang Schramm, “War Semiramis assyrische Regentin?” *Historia* 21 (1972): 513-521).

¹⁵ Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, *Neo-Assyrian Historical Inscriptions and Syria-Palestine: Israelite/Judean-Tyrian-Damascene Political and Commercial Relations in the Ninth-Eighth Centuries B.C.E.* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1995); 90-91; and Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 491; Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148; Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 44.

¹⁶ Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 44.

¹⁷ Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 491; H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might that Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), 78-79; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148.

honored probably for her involvement in dynastic stability by ensuring her son's succession and acting as his regent.¹⁸ Despite the few details of her life, she was an influential queen mother during the reign of her son as evidenced by her stele and temple statue.¹⁹

Naqi'a was the wife of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE), mother of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), and grandmother of Ashurbanipal (668-626 BCE).²⁰ She is also known by the name Zakūtu and Naqi'a-Zakūtu.²¹ She was able to influence Sennacherib into proclaiming her son, Esarhaddon, the crown-prince rather than his heir apparent, Arad-Ninlil.²² Correspondence shows that that she held authority within the court and was undoubtedly addressed as *ummi šarri*.²³

During Esarhaddon's reign, she built a palace for her son at Nineveh.²⁴ The commission and oversight of such a project by a woman had no precedent in Assyria. The building inscription followed the standard form and terminology of royal building

¹⁸ Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 491; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 347; and Weinfeld, "Semiramis," 99-103.

¹⁹ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 347; and Weinfeld, "Semiramis," 99-103.

²⁰ Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 45; and Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," 111-112.

²¹ Naqi'a is her West Semitic name and Zakūtu is the Akkadian/Assyrian translation. Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 45; Lewy, "Nitokris-Naqla," 272; and Sarah C. Melville, *The Role of Naqla/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* (SAA 9; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1990), xii.

²² Simo Parpola, "The Murderer of Sennacherib," in *Death in Mesopotamia: Papers Read at the XXVIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (ed. Bendt Alster; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 171-182; and Julian Reade, "Was Sennacherib a Feminist?" in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 142. See also Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," 111-112; and Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 169.

²³ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 348; and Melville, *The Role of Naqla/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 31-60.

²⁴ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 348; Melville, *The Role of Naqla/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 38; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148.

inscriptions but replaced the clause announcing the builder as the king with the acknowledgement of herself as builder.²⁵ With this construction project, “the message of Naqia’s status and authority was unambiguously presented to the public.”²⁶ She also maintained her own house with high officials.²⁷ As Esarhaddon’s queen mother, she received the estate of the previous queen mother.²⁸ A bronze tablet commissioned by Esarhaddon depicts him and Naqi’a together, an unusual representation but considered a sign of great respect for his mother.²⁹

In two dedicatory inscriptions by Naqi’a, she dedicates the rebuilt temples for the life of her son, the king, for her own life, and for the “stability of her reign (and) her well-being.”³⁰ Even though she lists Esarhaddon’s name first, recognizing his authority, she acknowledges that she ruled part of Assyria in his name.³¹ Indeed, letters addressed to “the mother of the king, my lord” by “your servant” seem to indicate that she ruled vast

²⁵ Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 348; Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 39-41; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148.

²⁶ Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 38.

²⁷ Lewy, “Nitokris-Naqia,” 274; Josef Kohler and Arthur Ungnad, *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden in Umschrift und Uebersetzung nebst einem Index der Personen-namen und Rechtserläuterungen* (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1913), 331, no. 535; and C. H. W. Johns and Agnes Sophia Griffith Johns, *ADD*, 220-221, no. 301.

²⁸ Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148. Sennacherib transferred the estate to Naqi’a upon his choice of Esarhaddon as his successor.

²⁹ Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 47; and Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 45.

³⁰ Johns and Johns, *ADD*, 1:498-99, no. 645; Kohler and Ungnad, *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden*, 14, no. 14; Lewy, “Nitokris-Naqia,” 273; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 149.

³¹ Lewy, “Nitokris-Naqia,” 273.

territory on her own.³² A particular servant, Na'id-Marduk, requested that Naqi'a send him troops because of a raid upon his territory by a band of Elamites. In the letter, he indicates that he previously corresponded with her about the raid. He also requests that she forward on this request for help to the king as influence for the necessary military aid.³³ The king wrote to his mother on several occasions to inform her that he had taken care of whatever matter it was she had requested.³⁴ Also, she may have ruled in Esarhaddon's absence as she received letters from Assyrian and Babylonian officials while he was away at war. One particular letter states that her decisions are "as final as the gods."³⁵

Naqi'a's activities were not limited to estate management or political influence as she played a significant cultic role as well. Despite the exclusion of most other women from religious rituals, Esarhaddon broke with tradition and included Naqi'a in his rituals. He also had statues commissioned of himself and Naqi'a to be placed in a temple and he included a depiction of his mother on a religious relief, a distinction held usually by kings

³² Lewy, "Nitokris-Naqa," 274; and Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 64-65.

³³ Lewy, "Nitokris-Naqa," 274; Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 64-65; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 170; and Leroy Waterman and Robert Francis Harper, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1930), 136-139, no. 917.

Melville perceives Na'id-Marduk's request was only in order to possibly influence Naqi'a to pressure the king into sending troops to him. For Melville, the letter is only evidence of the queen mother's influence with her son rather than a letter written to his official superior (Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 67). In opposition to these comments, Lewy claims that Naqi'a ruled over Babylonia herself, particularly around 683 to 670 BCE (Lewy, "Nitokris-Naqa," 277).

³⁴ Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (SAA 16; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 2002), 4-5, no. 2, 85, and 94.

³⁵ Luukko and Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, no. 2; 85, no. 94; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 191.

alone.³⁶ These two depictions are the only known ones of a woman placed in a temple and they represent “her status and Esarhaddon’s support before the gods and before those Assyrians of high enough rank to gain entrance to the sanctuary.”³⁷ Her involvement in the cult was not solely confined to a place beside her son but she also participated independently. As briefly mentioned above, she helped to rebuild temples and she also endowed religious festivals.³⁸

Naqi’a did not give way to a new queen mother upon Esarhaddon’s death. Due to the controversy surrounding Sennacherib’s death, she and Esarhaddon devised a plan to ensure a civil war would not ensue upon his death. Esarhaddon drew up a written document regarding succession to “increase public awareness of the stature and accomplishments of Naqi’a so that when the king died, the aristocracy would know and respect her royal position and authority and she could maintain control of the empire during the interregnum.”³⁹ Upon Esarhaddon’s sudden death, Naqi’a chose one of his younger sons, Ashurbanipal, to succeed him. With her great authority and respect and Esarhaddon’s highly important document regarding succession, she secured the support of the population and the members of the royal court and royal family in her choice of

³⁶ Stephen Cole and Peter Machinist, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* (SAA 13; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999), 159-60, n. 188; Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 46, 52; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 149. The scribe charged with the inscription of the statues consulted Naqi’a regarding the statues.

³⁷ Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 52.

³⁸ Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 149.

³⁹ Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 87-89; Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1988), 28-58, no. 6; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 148.

Ashurbanipal. Without her interference, his eldest brother, Šamaš-šum-kin, most likely would have succeeded to the throne.⁴⁰

Upon her choice of Ashurbanipal, Naqi'a instituted a loyalty oath between herself and the people. If anyone heard of any conspiracy against her or her grandson, acquired knowledge of an armed rebellion, or even spoke badly against her grandson, Naqi'a required the person to report all information to her. She even allowed for the killing of conspirators by the informants, who then had to bring the bodies to her.⁴¹ One particular text discusses her organization of the population and members of the royal court and royal family to swear oaths of loyalty and uphold Ashurbanipal's succession to the throne. Six times, the text names the queen mother first before anyone else.⁴² Naqi'a technically served as the queen of Assyria and sole ruler for twenty days, enforcing the succession treaty and managing the entire empire, until Ashurbanipal's coronation.⁴³

The Queen Mother of Babylonia

The only Babylonian queen mother's name to have survived is that of Adad-Guppi, sometimes spelled Adda-guppi. She was not the wife of a king but the mother of

⁴⁰ Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 34; Zafrira Ben-Barak, "Succession to the Throne in Israel and in Assyria," *OLP* 17 (1986): 92; Cazelles, "La mere du Roi-Messie dans l'Ancien Testament," 43; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 528; Daniel David Luckenbill, *ARAB* 2:380-381; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 348; and Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 79-90.

⁴¹ Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 528; Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 45; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 149.

⁴² Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 528; Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 89-90; and Parpola and Watanbe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 62-64, no. 8.

⁴³ Melville, *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*, 89-90; Parpola & Watanbe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 62-64, no. 8; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 149-150.

a non-royal son, Nabonidus (556-538 BCE), who became the last king of the Neo-Babylonian empire. She somehow seems to have played a part in managing his succession to the throne despite him not being the son of the previous king, Labashi-Marduk, or his father, Neriglassar.⁴⁴ Before Nabonidus' succession, Adad-guppi had attained considerable influence in the kingdom.⁴⁵ In her autobiography, she claims to have revered and watched over Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar, and Neriglassar. This courtly influence may have easily helped her to situate Nabonidus on the throne, as she claims to have done.⁴⁶

The information we have for Adad-guppi comes mostly from her autobiography, which was a privilege reserved only for kings.⁴⁷ This autobiography is inscribed on a stele that was intended to commemorate Nabonidus' restoration of the Eḫulḫul, the temple of Sîn in Ḫarran.⁴⁸ According to her own words, Adad-guppi seems to have taken an active role in the propagation of the moon god Sîn and other deities.⁴⁹ She depicts herself as a life-long devotee of Sîn and an extremely pious woman. She states that she is the servant or votaress of Sîn, Ningal, Nusku, and Sadarnunna, for whom she has cared

⁴⁴ Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," *JBL* 110 (Spr 1991): 33; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 260; and David B. Weisberg, "Royal Women of the Neo-Babylonian Period," *Le palais et la royauté: archéologie et civilization* 19 (1974): 447-453.

⁴⁵ Ben-Barak; "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 33; and Weisberg, "Royal Women of the Neo-Babylonian Period," 447-54.

⁴⁶ C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *AnSt* 8 (1958): 51.

⁴⁷ Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 150.

⁴⁸ Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 38; and Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 10; ed. William W. Hallo, Marvin H. Pope, and William K. Simpson; New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 73, 75.

⁴⁹ Ahlstrom, *Aspects of Syncretism*, 66; and Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*, 260.

since her youth.⁵⁰ She claims to have had Sîn “ever in mind,” without ceasing, prayed to him for Nabonidus’ kingship, and ensured that her son restored the temples of the gods in Harran.⁵¹ It was Sîn who lifted her up, set her “good name in the land, and made her to flourish.”⁵² Her prosperity probably refers to good health and an abundance of food as she follows this statement with a description of the clarity of her sight, hearing, and understanding and that “meat and drink” agreed with her.⁵³ Paul-Alain Beaulieu writes: “In her role as queen mother, it is only natural that she is depicted in her inscription expressing concern for the maintenance of cults and sanctuaries, as did all Neo-Babylonian kings.”⁵⁴

Adad-guppi’s autobiographical stele includes an afterword describing her death and funeral.⁵⁵ She died in a fortified military camp, an outpost to which she had traveled for unknown reasons.⁵⁶ The king declared a seven-day period of mourning, “an

⁵⁰ Ben-Barak, “The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne,” 38; Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 47; Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 225; and Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 349.

⁵¹ Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 47-49.

⁵² Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 49-51.

⁵³ Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 51.

⁵⁴ Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.*, 75. Beaulieu makes the distinction that Adad-guppi is not a high priestess but a devout worshipper as there is no evidence that her piety was one of a priestess. He states that the difference between priestly and lay piety is difficult to determine. Her inscription shows a religious concern typical of building inscriptions of her era. The building inscriptions of Nabopolassar and Nebuchanezzar are similarly concerned with cultic issues and demonstrates their piety as well but, Beaulieu argues, no one assumes that they are priests (*The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.*, 68, 74).

⁵⁵ Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 51-53.

⁵⁶ Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.*, 197-198.

indication of both the great honor in which she was held, and her status.”⁵⁷ According to a court chronicle, three days of mourning were observed in the camp where she died. Two months later, a national period of mourning was instituted for her.⁵⁸ The queen mother was buried in a splendid shroud adorned with precious stones and sweet oil anointed her corpse. Officials from far reaching places came to visit the king and pay their respects.⁵⁹ The king stood at the head of an elaborate ritual performed in Adad-guppi’s memory and honor.⁶⁰

The Queen Mother of Ebla

The queen mother in Ebla was involved in state matters but to what extent is unknown. The state documents only use the phrase “the king and his mother.”⁶¹ A surviving document states that the queen mother made the decision regarding an allotment of land to Ebrium’s sons (c. 2200 BCE).⁶² The only name of a queen mother to survive is Dusigu, the wife of Irkhab-Damu (c. 23rd cent. BCE) and the mother of Išar-Damu. Alfonso Archi and Maria Giovanna Biga argue that Dusigu had some involvement in her son’s succession, although she did not bear the title of queen. The

⁵⁷ Ben-Barak, “The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne,” 38; and Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 53.

⁵⁸ Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.*, 197-198; and Cazelles, “La mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 42-43.

⁵⁹ Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 53.

⁶⁰ Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 51-53; and Tetlow *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 105.

⁶¹ *TM 75.G.1688*; and Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 76. Based on chronology, Biga and Pomponio deduce that these documents are referencing Irkhab-Damu’s mother (Maria Giovanna Biga and Francesco Pomponio, “Elements for a Chronological Division of the Administrative Documentation of Ebla,” *JCS* 42, 2 [1990]: 195-197).

⁶² *TM 75.G.1444*; and Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla*, 76.

wife designated as queen died shortly after her marriage to Irkhab-Damu. For the first fourteen years of his reign, Išar-Damu did not marry and Dusigu served as the most important woman in his court.⁶³ After his marriage, several distribution lists of fabrics record Dusigu's name prior to the queen's name, attesting to the importance of the queen mother. Until her death seven years later, Dusigu continued to be listed first.⁶⁴ The honor bestowed upon the queen mother is also evident in two statues found in the administrative quarter of the royal palace in Ebla, according to Paolo Matthiae. The statues are of the queen and the queen mother, commissioned after her death, in which the queen pays homage to the deceased Dusigu.⁶⁵

The Queen Mother of Egypt

Little information is available for individual Egyptian queen mothers. Queen mothers appear to have held only a prominent position if they served as regents for their young sons, such as with Ahhotep, mother of Ahmose I (c. 1550-1525 BCE) and Ahmose-Nefertari, mother of Amenhotep I (c. 1526-1506 BCE). Regency was not, however, reserved for the queen mother. The famous pharaoh-queen, Hatshepsut (1479-1458 BCE), was queen regent for her nephew, Thutmose III, and Twosret served as regent for Siptah (1197-1191 BCE), who was of unknown parentage.⁶⁶

⁶³ Alfonso Archi and Maria Giovanna Biga, "A Victory Over Mari and the Fall of Ebla," *JCS* 55 (2003): 9-10.

⁶⁴ *TM* 75.G.1797 r. XV 16-19; *TM* 75.G.1840 v. I 7-11; Biga and Pomponio, "Elements for a Chronological Division," 180, 188; Archi and Biga, "A Victory Over Mari and the Fall of Ebla," 10; and Maria Giovanna Biga, "Femmes de la Famille Royale d'Ebla," in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 41.

⁶⁵ See Paolo Matthiae, "The Standard of the *maliktum* of Ebla in the Royal Archives Period," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 99, 2 (2009): 270-311.

⁶⁶ Barbara Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), 138-140.

What we know of queen mothers in Egypt pertains mainly to a general honorific title and a maternal role as dictated by cultic legend. The mother of the king was also considered the “daughter of the God,” who was the deceased king.⁶⁷ As such, she was responsible for the renewal of the god (the current king).⁶⁸ In this vein of thought, the queen mother carried the epithet, “all things that are said are done for her.”⁶⁹ This appellation emphasizes her royal position at court, which was one of extreme honor.⁷⁰ Two queen mothers were worshipped, Khentkaus and Ahmose-Nefertari, and Ahmose-Nefertari was even divinized.⁷¹ One may best explain the titles “mother of king” and “daughter of the God” through the conflation of the divine mother-consort as embodied by the goddess Nut. The king’s mother and his consort were often depicted on royal monuments in similar ritual scenes. The two women often shared titles and symbolic dress, so much that one woman could be substituted for the other in ritual depictions. In these scenes, it is only the caption that identifies her as either the wife or mother of the king with whom she was depicted. The conflation appears to be intentional as the two women separately represented the goddess Nut. The sun god, Amun-Ra, renewed

⁶⁷ Susan Tower Hollis, “Queens and Goddesses in Ancient Egypt,” in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 215; and Lisa K. Sabbahy, “The Development of the Titulary and the Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen from Dynasty One to Early Dynasty Eighteen” (Ph. D. diss.; University of Toronto, 1982), 317.

⁶⁸ Hollis, “Queens and Goddesses in Ancient Egypt,” 215; and Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Civilizations 14; Uppsala: Universitetet, 1986), 88-89.

⁶⁹ Hollis, “Queens and Goddesses in Ancient Egypt,” 215; Sabbahy, “The Development of the Titulary and the Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen,” 228; and Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, 88.

⁷⁰ Hollis, “Queens and Goddesses in Ancient Egypt,” 215; and Lisa Kuchman, “The Titles of Queenship: Part I, the Evidence from the Old Kingdom,” *Newsletter for the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 7, 3 (1977): 9-12 & pl. II.

⁷¹ Hollis, “Queens and Goddesses in Ancient Egypt,” 215; T. G. H. James, “Egypt: From the Expulsion of the Hyksos to Amenophis I,” in *CAH* 2:305-308; and Sabbahy, “The Development of the Titulary and the Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen,” 80.

himself continually by conceiving with Nut in the evening as he set and then was reborn from her at dawn. The pharaoh embodied the sun god physically but one woman alone was not able to embody the sky goddess. The role was split into mother and consort, both roles elevating their position at court and endowing them with a sort of divine queenship.⁷²

The queen mother also played a bridging cultic role between the previous pharaoh and her son. According to cultic ritual, Amun-Ra impregnates the principal wife of the previous pharaoh in order for the crown-prince to be born. This conception is not fully known, however, until the king succeeds to the throne. At this point, it becomes known that the queen mother procreated with Amun-Ra and that she is the god's divine consort. If a ceremony took place to acknowledge this event, the Egyptians did not record it.⁷³

The Queen Mother of Elam

Only a small hint from one text gives any evidence of queen mothers in Elam. The text describes one queen mother as *amma haštuk/hašduk*. The meaning of *haštuk* is unclear, although it appears in several texts not associated with the queen mother and seems to identify the personal name associated with it as "lord." One may possibly translate the entire phrase as "revered" or "honored mother" or even "mother of the ruler." We know no more about the queen mother than this one phrase.⁷⁴

⁷² Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993), 170; and Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, 25-27.

⁷³ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 171; and Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, 56.

⁷⁴ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 66; Seibert, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 48; George G. Cameron, *History of Early Iran* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 82 n 33; and Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 172.

The Queen Mother of Hattusa

Of all the ancient Near Eastern queen mothers, scholars most often draw comparisons between the Hittite queen mother and the ancient Israelite queen mother. The Hittite queen mother was called the *tawananna*.⁷⁵ This title referred primarily to her cultic function during pre-Hittite Anatolia and the Hittite Old Kingdom.⁷⁶ The *tawananna* was not necessarily the king's wife but she was the mother of the heir.⁷⁷ This position was one appointed for life, although a legal court could depose the queen mother.⁷⁸ The title seems to have been bestowed upon her after the naming of the crown prince if the current *tawananna* was not still living.⁷⁹ She often retained her position for several consecutive kings' reigns despite his biological mother's presence. Only after her

⁷⁵ Shoshana Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975), 105-106, 139, 158; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 172; and Elna Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup 349; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 74-75. The queen mother was called the *tawananna* but the king's sister and aunt have fulfilled the role as well despite their relation to the king as other than mother, which may be the remnants of outlawed brother-sister marriages or ruler-pairs or brother-successions. Even though there have been women who were not queen mothers serving in the position, the mothers of the kings did so.

⁷⁶ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 104, 160.

⁷⁷ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 105-106, 158.

⁷⁸ For more information on the removal of the *tawananna*, see Shoshana Arbeli, "The Removal of the Tawananna from Her Position," in *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean, c. 1500-1000 B.C.* (ed. Michael Heltzer and Edward Lipinski; Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 79-85. Her removal from office was not done at the whim of the king and required legal proceedings to take place (Arbeli, "The Removal of the Tawananna from Her Position," 80-83).

⁷⁹ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 181.

death or removal could a new *tawananna* achieve this post.⁸⁰ Only one woman, therefore, could hold the title of *tawananna* at a time.⁸¹

The *tawananna* was a high priestess under the title regardless of whether her son was crown prince or king.⁸² Fragments of ritual descriptions suggest she functioned as the head of the temple in Hattusa for Palaic and Hattian deities in pre-Hittite Anatolia. The Hattian texts from the early stages of the kingdom lack description of the *tawananna*'s qualities and only name her as the priestess.⁸³ Later, mostly from royal decrees, we learn that her main function was high priestess to the sun-goddess of Arinna, who guided the rulership of the Hittite Empire.⁸⁴ As such, she bore the priestly title, "the mother of the god" (*ama.dingir*). This position was the earthly counterpart of the mother of the god in the god's world.⁸⁵ Quite possibly, this title involved the power to heal as one wife who became *tawananna* prayed for the "good women" and "mothers of the god" to grant her husband a long life.⁸⁶ She may have dabbled in witchcraft and sorcery,

⁸⁰ Albrecht Goetze, *Kleinasien* (2d ed; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1957), 85-95; and O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 68; and Ktziah Spanier, "The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeon Court: Athaliah and Abi," in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* (JOSTSup 273; ed. Meir Lubetski, Claire Lubetski, and Sharon Keller; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 138..

⁸¹ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 76.

⁸² Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 158.

⁸³ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 43-44.

⁸⁴ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65; Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* 107-109, 120, 196; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 75-76.

⁸⁵ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65; and Arbeli, "The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position," 82-83. Ahlström speculates that this epithet, "mother of the god," explained her exalted position and that she was granted the position for life (Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 65).

⁸⁶ *KUB XXI 27.II.20*; and Arbeli, "The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position," 83. This *tawananna*-to-be was Pudu-ḥepa, whom I will discuss at length in the following section.

which was looked down upon by the king. She was also associated with serpents as she was given the attribute “serpent.”⁸⁷ Her power was so great that when she was removed from office, the king made a royal decree that her name could not be pronounced and the punishment for the crime of doing so was execution by hanging.⁸⁸

While her main role lay within the cult, she also played a part in international relations and politics within the royal court.⁸⁹ When a question arose about the suitability of an heir to succeed to the throne, the heir’s relationship to the *tawananna* resolved the issue, although we are unsure exactly how her relationship determined his succession.⁹⁰ She also had a partnership with the king but exercised some independent power as seen from her sole appearance on royal seals.⁹¹ The king, therefore, did not hold exclusive power over her. Her power was legitimately exercised through the cult, her wealth, her officials, and through diplomatic relations.⁹² The *tawananna* possessed extensive amounts of property, which ensured her independence and her control in certain political situations.⁹³ This section will discuss in further detail three particular women who held the title *tawananna* and their place in the Hittite monarchy: Tawananna, Danu-ḫepa, and Pudu-ḫepa.

⁸⁷ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 116-7. Asherah was not connected by name to the *tawananna* or her rituals.

⁸⁸ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 74.

⁸⁹ Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaean Court,” 138.

⁹⁰ Gary Beckman, “Royal Ideology and State Administration in Hittite Anatolia,” in *CANE* 1:537; Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 96-98; Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 76; and Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, 190.

⁹¹ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 179-180.

⁹² Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 78.

⁹³ Arbeli, “The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position,” 80.

The wife of Šuppiluliuma I (c. 1344-1322 BCE) and mother of Arnuwanda II (1322-1321 BCE) bore the title of *tawananna* as her given name in court records. This native Babylonian claimed the epithet, “High Priestess of the Sun Goddess of Arinna,” for her son’s reign only since his successor and her grandson, Muršili II (c. 1321-1295 BCE), deposed her.⁹⁴ Muršili accused her of replacing aspects of Hittite ritual with Babylonian traditions, misappropriation of cultic funds, and casting a deadly spell on one of the king’s wives.⁹⁵ The proceedings against Tawannana were so serious that Muršili defended his decision before the gods by stating that he did not kill her but only removed her of the status of “the mother of the god.”⁹⁶

Naturally, Tawannana’s successor was the mother of Muršili II, Danu-ḫepa. Danu-ḫepa functioned as *tawananna* under three reigns, Muršili II, his son Muwatalli (c. 1295–1272 BCE) and his grandson Urḫi-Tešub, also known as Muršili III (c. 1272–1265 BCE). She is depicted beside each of these three kings on royal seals.⁹⁷ The uncle of Urḫi-Tešub, Hattušili III (c. 1265-1237 BCE), brought charges against Danu-ḫepa for her removal as *tawananna*. After her deposal, he sought to destroy her and her supporters by

⁹⁴ RS 17.227; Emmanuel Laroche, “Documents Hieroglyphiques Hittites Provenant du Palais D’Ugarit,” in *Ugaritica III: Sceaux et Cylindres Hittites* (ed. Claude F-A. Schaeffer; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1956), 101; and Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeon Court,” 138.

⁹⁵ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 188; and Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeon Court,” 138.

⁹⁶ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 189; and Arbeli, “The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position,” 83. Arbeli notes that extant literature records only two *tawanannas* holding the title of “the mother of the god.” A legal court deposed both of these women: Tawannana and her successor, Danu-ḫepa, whom I will discuss next (Arbeli, “The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position,” 83).

⁹⁷ Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* 174-175; Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 166; Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 76; and Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeon Court,” 138-139.

banishment, citing a legal proceeding he attributed to Muršili II.⁹⁸ The banishment of Danu-ḥepa and her supporters deprived her of any power and influence as her office allowed her to interact closely with the royal family and court officials.⁹⁹ Hattušili issued an edict which forbade the mention of her name, written or spoken.¹⁰⁰

Not surprisingly, Danu-ḥepa's replacement was a relative of Hattušili III, his wife, Pudu-ḥepa. Once he succeeded to the throne, she filled the vacuum left by Danu-ḥepa's removal. Pudu-ḥepa warrants discussion here because she eventually functioned as a queen mother for her son, Tudhaliya IV (c. 1237-1209 BCE), including serving as his regent.¹⁰¹ At court, she continued the tradition of the *tawananna*'s power and involvement with affairs of the state.¹⁰² She was also influential in international relations as a silver tablet regarding a treaty between Egypt and Hatti depicts her with the goddess of Hatti. The treaty also refers to her as the queen of the land of Hatti, the priestess and

⁹⁸ Arbeli "The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position," 80-81; Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 193; and Spanier, "The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court," 139.

⁹⁹ *KUB*, XIV 7.I.19 (1934); Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom* 74; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 75. Spanier calls attention to Danu-ḥepa's numerous officials and several fortified cities that were under her command (Spanier, "The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court," 138).

¹⁰⁰ Arbeli, "The Removal of the *Tawananna* from Her Position," 80. In the testament of his reign, Hattušili makes no mention of Danu-ḥepa.

¹⁰¹ *RS* 17.159 and 17.133; Laroche, "Documents Hieroglyphiques Hittites Provenant du Palais D'Ugarit," 111; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 167; and Spanier, "Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court," 139. Ben-Barak notes that there is a matter of dispute as to Pudu-ḥepa's regency for her son ("The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 37). Even if her regency is not considered here, she still served as *tawananna* during her son's reign.

¹⁰² *RS* 27.259; Bin-Nun, *The Tawananna in the Hittite Kingdom*, 16; and Laroche, "Documents Hieroglyphiques Hittites Provenant du Palais D'Ugarit," 111.

the servant of the sun goddess, and the lady of the land. In one instance, she was the sole authority in a judicial case involving different polities under Hittite hegemony.¹⁰³

The Queen Mother of Sidon

Little work has been done with the Sidonian queen mother other than the translation of the Ešmunazor inscription, which names the king's mother and is dated to 500-450 BCE.¹⁰⁴ The inscription describes Ummiašart, the mother of king Ešmunazor, as “the priestess of Ašart.”¹⁰⁵ The Phoenician inscription seems to indicate that the queen mother was a patron for the goddess and consort of El from the description: “we are the one who built the houses of the gods...”¹⁰⁶

Ummiašart, also known as Amoašart, may have also functioned as Ešmunazor's regent. Ešmunazor died in the fourteenth year of his reign and his inscription testifies that he was “snatched away before (his) time,” suggesting that he was still a young boy at the time of his death.¹⁰⁷ While being a child-king does not immediately imbue the queen mother with the role of regency, the inscription lists accomplishments of Ešmunazor as both actions of his and his mother's, such as buildings for the gods and the annexation of

¹⁰³ RS 17.133; and Spanier, “Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeon Court,” 138-139.

¹⁰⁴ KAI 2:19-23; Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 135; Susan Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 189; and P. Kyle McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription of Eshmunazor, King of Sidon (2.57),” in *COS 2*:182;.

¹⁰⁵ G. A. Cooke, *A Text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 30; and McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription,” 183.

¹⁰⁶ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 135; Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 189; and McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription,” 183. McCarter writes that Ummiašart's name means “my (divine) mother is (the goddess) Ašart” (“The Sarcophagus Inscription,” 183 n 9).

¹⁰⁷ KAI 2:2-3, 12; Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 188; and McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription,” 183.

Dor and Joffa as Sidonian territories. Given the emphasis on “we,” Ummiaštar and Ešmunazor appeared to have ruled together.¹⁰⁸

The Queen Mother of Sumer

Little is known of the Sumerian queen mother. We are aware that she also received the title of *ama.dingir*, “mother of the god.” The appellation would seem to suggest that her position was religiously based or priestly.¹⁰⁹ As previously established with the Hittite queen mother who received the same title, the woman who bore the appellation served as the earthly counterpart of the mother of the god.¹¹⁰ Given the religious implication of the Hittite queen mother’s role, the Sumerian queen mother may have served as the mother of the god for her kingdom.

The Queen Mother of Ugarit

The Ugaritic term *rbt/rabitu* sheds some light on the queen mother of Ugarit. The mother of the king was actually called the queen (*malkatu*) instead of his wife.¹¹¹ The chief consort, the one who will bear the crown prince, *uthriyannu*, in his harem was labeled as *rbt/rabitu*. This term, however, can also mean “queen mother to be.” She achieved her most prominent position as *malkatu* after the king’s death.¹¹² Her main role,

¹⁰⁸ *KAI* 2:18-20; Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 189; Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 135; and McCarter, “The Sarcophagus Inscription,” 183.

¹⁰⁹ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism*, 65.

¹¹⁰ See also the section of the Ugaritic queen mother as she, too, bore the title of “the mother of the god.”

¹¹¹ Cyrus H. Gordon, “Ugaritic RBT/ RABĪTU,” *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (ed. Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor; JSOTSup 67; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 127. See also, Molin, “Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda,” 168.

¹¹² Gordon, “Ugaritic RBT/ RABĪTU,” 127, 129.

which was cultic, is attested in that she shared the same appellative as Asherah, *rbt/rabit*, which may be translated as “great lady.”¹¹³ In mythological tablets, El, the head of the pantheon, calls upon his *rabitu* Asherah to nominate one of her sons to become king after the death of Baal. The successor to the Ugaritic throne was required to be the son of the *rabitu*, who was the equivalent of Asherah upon earth.¹¹⁴

The association of the queen mother with Asherah as the *rabitu* would lend naturally to the *hieros gamos* ritual evident in the Ugaritic cult. When the virgin goddess gave birth to the divine child, she was called the “mother goddess.” When the queen gave birth to the future king and then saw his accession to the throne, she became the “queen mother” or *paredros* of the king.¹¹⁵ *Paredros* is the appellative given to the Ugaritic goddess Athirat, who is often equated with Asherah.¹¹⁶ The queen mother was called the “ruler of the gods” and “the mother of the gods.” The Ugaritic queen mother’s position was an earthly replica of that of the mother of the god.¹¹⁷ Upon a king’s death, he received the title “divine one,” lending again to the notion of divine sonship and parenthood for king and mother.¹¹⁸

Several letters exist that describe a king paying homage to the queen mother and her power and authority by bowing at her feet. He also invokes the gods’ names and asks

¹¹³ Gordon, “Ugaritic RBT/ *RABĪTU*,” 127.

¹¹⁴ *KTU* 1.6; and Gordon, “Ugaritic RBT/ *RABĪTU*,” 129-130.

¹¹⁵ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 183; and Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism*, 68-69, 71.

¹¹⁸ Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 181-182.

them to guard his mother and give her peace.¹¹⁹ In these same letters, the king imbues the queen mother with great authority by addressing her as *adt*, which seems to be a feminine form of *adn*, “lord.”¹²⁰ We also know that the queen mother owned land and could also buy additional land and property. Her property was vast enough to require the personal ownership of storage facilities.¹²¹

One story comes to us regarding a particular queen mother. King Ammištamru (c. 1260-1235 BCE) divorced the *rabitu* for an unknown sin and married the daughter of Bentešina, sister to the king of Amurru. The divorced wife took refuge in her native land. We can assume that the marriage contract stipulates that the original wife’s son would be Ammištamru’s heir as the text refers to her as the *rabitu*. Despite the divorce, Utrišarruma, Ammištamru’s son, will still succeed to the throne upon his father’s death. Two conditions are placed upon that succession: Utrišarruma cannot join his mother where she had fled and he cannot allow his mother to return to Ugarit and act as his queen mother.¹²²

Conclusion

Records by and regarding royal women in the ancient Near East during the time of the ancient Israelite monarchy outweigh the records we have about the royal women of

¹¹⁹ *RS* 11.872, *KTU* 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.24, 2.30, 2.33; Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 182; and Charles Virolleaud, “Lettres et Documents Administratifs Provenant des Archives d’Ugarit,” *Syria* 21 (1940): 250-253.

¹²⁰ *KTU* 2.11, 2.12, 2.24, 2.33; Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 183; and Cazelles, “La mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 43.

¹²¹ *RS* 17.86, 17.102, 17.325; *KTU* 4.143.

¹²² *RS* 17.159; Ackerman, “Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East,” 183-184; Gordon, “Ugaritic RBT/ *RABĪTU*,” 128-129; and Spanier, “Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaean Court,” 137-138.

ancient Israel. Little of the information on royal women, however, pertains to the mother of the king. The queen mothers in Israel as well as queen mothers from at least nine societies and kingdoms (Assyria, Babylonia, Ebla, Egypt, Elam, Hattusa, Sumer, Sidon, and Ugarit) in the ancient Near East seem to have functioned in powerful roles at court, be they cultic, social, or administrative. Past scholarship has drawn mostly upon the biblical literature for information on the ancient Israelite queen mothers and, unfortunately, with regards to the queen mothers of the ancient Near East, scholarship has heavily favored research on the Judean mothers despite no extrabiblical evidence of the women or their position. The ancient Near East, however, can inform the position of the Hebrew queen mother. Leila Leah Bronner writes: “The queen mothers of ancient Israel do not possess the same level of power as their ancient Near Eastern counterpart, but they nonetheless, seem to hold similar positions.”¹²³

The notion of a queen mother in ancient Israel, therefore, is not anachronistic nor entirely a figment of the imagination of the narrator. Given the concrete evidence of powerful queen mothers from nine surrounding societies, the position of the queen mother in the northern and southern kingdoms is entirely a feasible and probable courtly position. As such, Judah or both kingdoms may have looked to these other nations to structure the royal house, taking similar concepts of the queen mother as an institution for the mother of the king. Given this notion, I now turn to the text of 1 Sam 8:19-20, in which the ancient Israelites request a king.

¹²³ Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 48.

“A (Queen Mother) Like the Nations”

While there is no indication that the northern and southern kingdoms did indeed model the royal household after the other nations, the above study of queen mothers and the biblical text gives us a possible foundation for the position of the ancient Israelite queen mother. Narratively, we can see the establishment of the ancient Israelite monarchy unfolding in 1 Sam 8. Historical criticism reveals serious issues with taking this chapter as a reliable historical reconstruction of the institution of the monarchy. Throughout 1 Sam 8-12, the text in its final form presents contradictory evidence of the kingdom’s evolution in the form of *königsfeind* versus *königsfreund*. This ambiguity regarding the kingship evidences a mix of tracts from different times.¹²⁴ Anthony Phillips writes: “We are not dealing with history but a theological reconstruction of events understood as determined by Yahweh himself and culminating in the accession of Solomon as king.”¹²⁵ Since the passage poses historical difficulties, I will view it with a means to explain the position of the queen mother from a narrative standpoint.

1 Samuel 8 begins with the statement that the prophet Samuel has grown old and appointed his sons as judges over Israel. These sons do not follow in the ways of Samuel but act unjustly in their judicial dealings (v 3). The elders of Israel gather and confront Samuel about this problem. They demand Samuel appoint a *king* to judge them, a king “like all the nations” (v 5). Samuel states his displeasure to Yahweh but Yahweh, while voicing displeasure at the request as well, commands him to give the Israelites a king but

¹²⁴ For examples, see J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses, Vol. 4: Vow and Desire (1 Sam. 1-12)* (trans. L. Waaning-Wardle; SSN; ed. W. A. M. Beuken et al; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 322; Gnana Robinson, *Let Us Be Like the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 49-50; and Ronald F. Youngblood, *EBC* 3:610.

¹²⁵ Anthony Phillips, *David: A Story of Passion and Tragedy* (London: SPCK, 2008), 20.

includes a warning (vv 6-9). Samuel expounds upon this warning of abuses by the monarchy at great length (vv 11-18), but the people do not heed his words and still cry out for a king to be over them so that they will “also be like all the nations” (v 20a). The people want a king to judge them and a king to go before them and fight their battles (v 20b). The chapter ends with Samuel repeating the people’s words to Yahweh and Yahweh reiterating the previous command to set a king over them (vv 21-22).

Scholars have articulated in various ways the people’s reason for the request of a king like the other nations and these articulations fall into two categories. First, scholars focus on the physical need for a government with a king at its head. Joyce G. Baldwin calls attention to the similarity between these verses and Deut 17:14-15 in order to state that the Israelites desire to emulate other nations. To be specific, the people want to be like the nations to have influence and status.¹²⁶ Shimon Bar-Efrat simply states that the people want a king like the nations so that the Israelites will not fall behind and be outstripped by the other nations.¹²⁷ William McKane explains that the translation of 1 Sam 8:20 should be “among all the nations” rather than “like...” The Israelites are looking for “effective leadership in a hostile world, with the implication that other nations have political structures which have their centre in a king, and that Israel must acquire the enhanced solidarity and coordination of resources made possible by this institution.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; ed. D. J. Wiseman; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1988), 84, 86. Firth also references Deuteronomy 17 and claims that the ancient Israelites were hiding their request in this text to make the request appear legitimate [David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 8; ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 116].

¹²⁷ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Das Erste Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (BWANT; ed. Walter Dietrich and Horst Balz; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2007), 149.

¹²⁸ William McKane, *I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary* (TBC; ed. John Marsh and Alan Richardson; London: SCM, 1963), 65.

The elders are expecting a man to exercise leadership to keep Israel from functioning at a disadvantage in relation to the other monarchies.¹²⁹ David Jobling writes that the people are seeking political independence in order to prevent any of the nations from conquering or dominating them.¹³⁰ According to David G. Firth, the people are seeking more than a government with a king as a visible head of the state but they also want a human ruler with the same authority as their neighbors.¹³¹ J. P. Fokkelman argues that the people feel that their current predicament cannot any longer “be saved by the means and terms of the present form of government of so-called judges, and reach for another form of government which will change the nation at once: from a loose tribal confederation into a true state.”¹³²

Second, scholars focus upon ancient Israel’s rejection of its unique status in requesting a king like the nations. Lyle M. Eslinger argues that the Israelites are rejecting their covenant with Yahweh as a priestly kingdom and holy nation. The elders are seeking a non-covenantal political structure out from under the ownership of Yahweh. This repudiation is a “proclamation of independence, a vocal manifesto ending allegiance to the divine king.”¹³³ David Toshio Tsumura agrees that Israel is seeking to rid itself of its special status as Yahweh’s chosen people, a people unique and incomparable with any

¹²⁹ McKane, *I & II Samuel*, 66.

¹³⁰ David Jobling, *I Samuel* (Berit Olam; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998), 74.

¹³¹ Firth, *I & Samuel*, 113.

¹³² Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 331.

¹³³ Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of I Samuel 1-12* (Bible and Literature Series; ed. David M. Gunn; Decatur: Almond, 1985), 279.

nation, so that they can identify with the nations around them.¹³⁴ Roger L. Omanson and John F. Ellington emphasize that the clause “like all the nations” is a reference to non-Israelite people in distinction from the Israelites, a reflection on their theological perception of status before Yahweh.¹³⁵ From the standpoint of the Deuteronomists, according to Tony W. Cartledge, Israel is meant not to be like the other nations and their status as God’s chosen people places Yahweh as their sole ruler.¹³⁶

The ancient Israelites seem no longer to feel that their unique status as a chosen people can solely serve them. According to 1 Sam 8, the people demand a physical manifestation of a ruler to fight their battles literally. Instead of seeking a new form of government unprecedented in ancient Israel or the surrounding nations, they look to their neighbors to formulate that government, one of a monarchy led by a king.¹³⁷ While the text emphasizes the king’s place, it does not seem so far-fetched that the Israelites would extend that new government beyond the king into a royal court also modeled on the nations. Given the importance of the queen mother among the nations, one could logically include her among the innovation of the monarchy in ancient Israel.¹³⁸ The ancient Near Eastern queen mothers previously discussed give a basis for and make

¹³⁴ David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 249.

¹³⁵ Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington; *A Handbook on The First and Second Books of Samuel, vol. 1* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), 168.

¹³⁶ Tony W. Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; ed. Samuel E. Balentine; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 117. See also Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; ed. James L. Mays; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 62.

¹³⁷ Scott Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Image Books, 2001), 79.

¹³⁸ Cazelles, “La mere du Roi-Messie dans l’Ancien Testament,” 49; and Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen*, 79.

historically plausible the various manners in which the ancient Israelite queen mothers acted similarly within their own courts.

A word of caution is necessary, however. Carol Smith warns that comparisons between the ancient Near Eastern queen mothers and the ancient Israelite queen mothers are suspect as there is comparatively little relevant evidence regarding queenship (which includes the queen mother) in both the nations of the ancient Near East and ancient Israel. She does believe one can make comparisons upon the assumption that while “Israel and Judah were completely unlike their neighbours with regard to queenship . . . they were clearly very like them in other respects.”¹³⁹ She points out how the biblical narrators complain regularly that the people were too much like their neighbors.¹⁴⁰ One cannot view the ancient Israelite monarchy as completely reflecting the surrounding monarchies as the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite monarchies often were different from each other. In response, however, the narrator of 1 Samuel-2 Kings envisions the formulation of the monarchy as dependent upon its neighbors. From a literary perspective, then, the mother of the king receives a prominent place in the royal court of Israel as she does among the other nations.

The Queen Mother of This Nation, the Gēbîrâ

Outside of ancient Near Eastern parallels and the extension of 1 Sam 8:19-20 to the queen mother, how then can one establish a sanctioned position for the queen mother in Israel’s court through biblical evidence? The texts in which the queen mothers appear

¹³⁹ Carol Smith, “‘Queenship’ in Israel? The Cases of Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 147-148.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, “‘Queenship’ in Israel,” 148.

outside of the formulas only narrate their actions rather than give proof that the mothers of the kings held an actual court position. At most, these brief passages inform us to what extent a queen mother could rise individually. The key in determining their place at court lies in the text's usage of *gēbîrâ* for the queen mothers. As I will show below, the word applies to the woman who is foremost in her household or kingdom, which is the queen mother for the Israelite monarchy.

Brown-Driver-Briggs offers these two definitions for *gēbîrâ*: “1. lady, queen . . . 2. queen-mother . . .”¹⁴¹ Kosmala, in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, writes: “a term applied to a woman in contrast to a girl, and indicates that she has some official position.”¹⁴² The term, גְּבִירָה, appears in the Hebrew Bible fifteen times: Gen 16:4, 8, 9; 1 Kgs 11:19; 15:13//2 Chr 15:16; 2 Kgs 5:3; 10:13; Isa 24:2; 47:5, 7; Jer 13:18; 29:2; Ps 123:2; and Prov 30:23. From these occurrences, Holladay lists three definitions: (1) lady, mistress; (2) “lady,” title of the queen mother, metaphor of Babylon; and (3) title of the queen, chief consort of the Pharaoh.¹⁴³ Ben-Barak divides the occurrences into three principal meanings similar to Holladay's definitions:

(1) mother or wife of the reigning sovereign (1 Kgs 11:19; 2 Kgs 10:13; Jer 29:2; 1 Kgs 15:13; 2 Chr 15:16; Jer 13:18); (2) female ruler, governess (Isa 47:5, 7); (3) mistress in relation to maidservant (Gen 16:4, 8, 9; 2 Kgs 5:3; Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Isa 24:2). The most common and frequently applied of these three meanings is that of queen mother.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ *BDB*, 150.

¹⁴² Hans Kosmala, “*gābhar*,” *TDOT* 2:373.

¹⁴³ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Brill, 1988), 54. See also, *HALOT*, 1:173.

¹⁴⁴ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 23.

Solvang states that the term is “technically” applied to a woman with servants, denoting a status of ruling authority parallel to that of a “master” (מֶלֶךְ). She then adds that the text uses it in a royal sense for foreign queens and some Judean queen mothers.¹⁴⁵

These definitions offer little in the way of concrete evidence for the title bestowed upon the queen mothers. Three queen mothers of the northern and southern kingdoms held this title, but did these three individuals aspire to the title or was it inherently theirs as queen mothers? Zafirra Ben-Barak, Nancy R. Bowen, and Carol Smith devote two articles and a major article section, respectively, to discredit specifically the notion that all queen mothers held the title rather than simply dismissing the notion because the text only attributes the title to three mothers and never in the context of the regnal formulas. In providing evidence for the title as a position for the queen mother in general, the woman foremost in the nation, the following will investigate the necessary texts to prove my position and dialogue with these three authors.

In regards to the queen mother, the first use of *gēbîrâ* for the queen mother occurs in the passage regarding Maacah, Asa’s grandmother.¹⁴⁶ The regnal formulas list her as his mother but the text also records her as the mother of Abijam, who is Asa’s father, thereby making her his grandmother or proclaiming her incestuous relationship with her own son, a concern addressed in chapter four. In 1 Kgs 15:13, Asa removes her from being the *gēbîrâ* due to her involvement with an abominable image of Asherah or an

¹⁴⁵ Solvang, *A Woman’s Place is in the House*, 73. See also, Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 117. Donner states that the text expands and reinterprets the term when applied to the queen mother (Donner, “Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament,” 105).

¹⁴⁶ I will discuss Maacah, as well as the other queen mothers, in greater detail in the following chapters. This section is meant to deal only with the determination of *gēbîrâ* as a title for the queen mothers.

asherah in the temple. The implication is that the king must remove her from this position in order to end her influence and power, possibly associated with her cultic actions.¹⁴⁷ The title itself must imbue a position upon Maacah or else Asa could not have removed her from being the *gēbîrâ*. It was not an inalienable rank simply because she was the grand/mother of the king.¹⁴⁸ A problem immediately arises; one cannot equate the mother of the king with the *gēbîrâ* if Asa's *grandmother* held the position and not his own mother.¹⁴⁹ She could, however, receive the title if she was the foremost woman of the nation due to an absence of his own mother.

The second instance of the text's usage of *gēbîrâ* occurs in 2 Kgs 10:13. Scholars have been quick to assume that this text is referring to Jezebel, simply because of the assumption that all queen mothers may hold the title of *gēbîrâ*. I agree that this *gēbîrâ* is Jezebel but not based on the assumption that all queen mothers held the title. Jehu, ruler of the northern kingdom, attempts to exterminate the Omride dynasty and all of Ahab's descendants, presumably to avenge for Ahab and Jezebel forcefully taking Naboth's vineyard and because of the prophetic mandate from Elisha (2 Kgs 9:10). Jehu slaughters both the kings of northern and southern monarchies (Jehoram and Ahaziah), the sons of Ahab, and all high-ranking officials who might still be loyal to the house of Omri. The brothers of Ahaziah approach Jehu and declare that they are journeying to meet the sons of the king and the sons of the *gēbîrâ* (2 Kgs 10:13). This group of men is seeking the

¹⁴⁷ Nancy R. Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," *CBQ* 63, 4 (Oct 2001): 609.

¹⁴⁸ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 61; A. Salvesen, "Royal Family," in *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 649; and Ktziah Spanier, "The Queen Mother in the Judaeon Royal Court: Maacah—A Case Study," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (FCB; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 193.

¹⁴⁹ See Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 609.

ones who could function as an heir to the northern throne, particularly whoever has the strongest claim for succession.¹⁵⁰

According to Bowen, the delegation is seeking first and foremost the firstborn or eldest of Jehoram's surviving sons. Bowen states that they are also seeking the sons of the *gēbîrâ* as a subset of his sons because she is his favored wife. The *gēbîrâ*, therefore, is not Jezebel but Jehoram's wife as her sons would have the strongest claim to the throne. Bowen argues that dynastic succession is at play here and the rule of succession does not allow for brothers to inherit the throne. The delegation would seek a brother of Jehoram only if he died without a son, which the text does not indicate, according to Bowen.¹⁵¹

Indeed, Jehoram's sons are the most favorable candidates. If the delegation is seeking any of his sons, however, then why clarify the request with the sons of the *gēbîrâ*? Jehoram was a brother who became king rather than as the chosen son, contrary to the rules of dynastic succession cited by Bowen.¹⁵² They are seeking, therefore, his sons and his brothers, the sons of the *gēbîrâ*, who is the mother of the king. Indeed, the sons of the favored wife have the greatest appeal for succession. Given the extensive slaughter that could have easily killed all of Jehoram's sons, however, those seeking an

¹⁵⁰ Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 611.

¹⁵¹ Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 611-612. Smith describes these sons as "the royal princes" and declares them the sons of Ahaziah (Smith, "'Queenship' in Israel," 144). Assuming that she miswrote Ahaziah rather than Jehoram, Smith offers no explanation as to why the *gēbîrâ* is definitely his wife and not mother. Assuming that Smith indeed meant Ahaziah, Jehoram's brother who reigned before him, she does not take into account the fact that the text states that Ahaziah died without sons (2 Kgs 1:17). If the delegation was not aware that Ahaziah had no sons, it is peculiar that the delegation is seeking the previous king's sons, which would mean a nephew of Jehoram would inherit the throne rather than a son or another brother.

¹⁵² Brothers who have reigned include Abijam and Asa, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah and Jehoiachin.

heir would consider any male relative and, therefore, they seek *any* of Jehoram's sons by any wife *and* his brothers as they are able to assume the throne as well.

The final references of *gěbîrâ* to a queen mother, Nehushta, the mother of Jehoiachin, occur in Jer 13:18 and 29:2. The first occurrence is a lament, which calls for the king (presumably Jehoiachin) and the *gěbîrâ* to take a lowly seat as their crowns have come down. Bowen points out that the lament does not identify any relationship between the king and *gěbîrâ*.¹⁵³ According to Bowen, since “the king is the royal man in Judah and Jerusalem of preeminent rank, then by analogy the *gěbîrâ* must be the royal woman of preeminent rank. But since the woman is not specifically identified, this passage is ambiguous about who that woman is.”¹⁵⁴ Jeremiah 22:26, however, places the king and his mother side by side in receiving Yahweh's punishment when Yahweh declares he will hurl the king, specifically Jehoiachin, and his mother into a foreign country. In both passages, a woman stands beside the king and receives punishment with him. If the woman is the mother of the king in Jer 22:26, then she would also be his mother in Jer 13:18.

The second reference to Nehushta is in Jer 29:2. Here, the text records a list of exiles that names the king first and the *gěbîrâ* second. Bowen's argument can apply here as well: the passage does not list a relation between the king and *gěbîrâ* and, therefore, remains ambiguous at best. Smith writes that this woman is not necessarily Jehoiachin's mother, but she is possibly the mother of his sons. Yet, two other exile lists exist in the text. In 2 Kgs 24:12, Jehoiachin surrenders himself and then his mother (his wives are

¹⁵³ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gěbîrâ*,” 613.

¹⁵⁴ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gěbîrâ*,” 614. Solvang points out that this passage could be referring to Zedekiah and Hamutal rather Jehoiachin and Nehushta (Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 74). If so, then, the text is still speaking about a king-mother pair.

not mentioned). 2 Kings 24:15 includes an additional list of those carried away, recording Jehoiachin first and his mother second (his wives are listed third). There is no precedent for equating the lists that record “his mother/the mother of the king” with “the mother of his sons,” as Smith suggests as a possibility. The phrase would only make sense if one wishes to ignore the one listing for the king’s wives, which would include the mother of the king’s sons, and the prominence of the queen mothers in the text and the regnal formulas. The assumption, therefore, would be that any references to “his mother” anywhere in the text could mean “the mother of his sons.” If his mother, Nehushta, appears second in these lists and the *gēbîrâ* appears second in the list in Jer 29:2, then logic dictates that these women are one and the same. Ben-Barak argues that the order in the list indicates an order of precedence. She also cites these verses as a testament to Nehushta’s acquiring significant power at court. Susan Ackerman writes that because of the king and queen mother’s condemnation together and the verses listing them first among the exiles, they are the nation’s two most powerful authorities.¹⁵⁵ Nehushta, the *gēbîrâ*, is, therefore, the foremost woman in the kingdom.

Ben-Barak criticizes those who attempt to make general conclusions about the office of the *gēbîrâ* on “the basis of so sporadic and insubstantial a sample of instances in kind. Rather than being regarded as isolated exceptions to the rule, this handful of cases has furnished the occasion for a general assertion concerning the character of the *gēbîrâ* in general.”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the character of the *gēbîrâ* is difficult to determine when these queen mothers have little in common. Their characters exhibit the possible roles (cultic,

¹⁵⁵ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137.

¹⁵⁶ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 28.

administrative, and social) and actions of which a *gēbîrâ* is capable. Ben-Barak also claims that the queen mothers who manage to rise to a position of prominence only have two circumstances in common: the accession of a younger son and her own power to ensure his succession. Her conclusion, therefore, is that the *gēbîrâ* or the queen mother had no official position.¹⁵⁷ Ben-Barak does not investigate all the instances in which the term *gēbîrâ* appears and only discusses the queen mothers (Bathsheba, Maacah, Hamutal, and Nehushta) that she claims scholars have used in the past to prove the power and office of the *gēbîrâ*.¹⁵⁸ The evidence for a sanctioned position, however, is a common characteristic running through all but three of the references (1 Kgs 11:19; 15:13; and 2 Kgs 10:13) to the *gēbîrâ*. This designation of the foremost woman in the household becomes more obvious as the remainder of the references enter the discussion.

I have established so far the relationship of the queen mother to the appellative *gēbîrâ*. One can attribute two other meanings to the word: mistress and female ruler. Genesis 16:4, 8, and 9 use *gēbîrâ* in relation to Sarah, Abraham's principal wife, as being over her servant Hagar.¹⁵⁹ 2 Kings 5:3 speaks of the wife of Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, as *gēbîrâ*. She appears to be the primary wife of his household. Psalm 123:2, Prov 30:23, and Isa 24:2 compare a servant with her mistress, *gēbîrâ*. These women are in positions that place them foremost in their households or foremost over servants.

¹⁵⁷ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 34.

¹⁵⁸ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 24-25.

¹⁵⁹ In ch. 5, I will argue that the narrator specifically uses *gēbîrâ* to evoke the queen mother in matters of succession.

In regards to rulership, Isa 47:5 and 7 use *gēbîrâ* in the passage describing Babylon's humiliation. The chapter begins with the command that Babylon is to sit on the ground without a throne (v 1). She will no longer be called the *gēbîrâ* of the kingdoms (v 5) despite her proclamation that she will be *gēbîrâ* forever (v 7). The passage is obviously not referring to a queen mother but to a female ruler. If she is the ruler of the kingdoms, then she is the foremost person of those nations. She is the foremost nation on the scene of the surrounding nations. In 1 Kgs 11:19, Hadad, an adversary of Solomon, finds favor with the current Pharaoh, who gives his sister-in-law to Hadad in marriage. This woman is the sister of his wife, Taphenes, whom the text calls *gēbîrâ*. She, too, is not a queen mother but a female ruler. We do not know if she is the foremost woman of the kingdom as the Egyptian queen mother may have outranked her. As the text perceives her as a female ruler, she appears to be the preeminent woman of her nation as viewed by the narrator.¹⁶⁰

With the exception of 1 Kgs 11:19; 15:13; and 2 Kgs 10:13, *gēbîrâ* is used exclusively of women who are foremost in their household, the nation, or, in the case of Babylon, the ancient Near East. The three occurrences that do not indicate the foremost woman are ambiguous and one cannot argue the opposite. So, by definition then, the *gēbîrâ* is the woman who is foremost in her household or the nation.¹⁶¹ Smith does not argue with this possibility but poses an intriguing challenge to this definition. She writes that the *gēbîrâ* could be "the most significant woman in the kingdom at that time: in

¹⁶⁰ Patricia J. Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," *JBQ* 24, 1 (Jan-Mar 1996): 26; Salvesen, "Royal Family," 848; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 73.

¹⁶¹ See also, Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," 26.

which case, she could well be the queen, although she might well not be.”¹⁶² She questions if the *gēbîrâ*’s power and influence are a consequence of the title or if she received the title for her power. Her conclusion is that a woman receives the title as recognition of her power, which would “mean that a woman could be a *gēbîrâ* without being the mother of the king or even a member of the royal court, or could also be a ‘queen mother’ without being designated *gēbîrâ*.”¹⁶³ First, her conclusion is one an assumption, from her presentation of the material, one could conclude quite the opposite. Second, if the *gēbîrâ* received her title for the power and influence she already wielded, then what about other powerful women, especially royal women, who did not receive the title? Bathsheba, the Queen of Sheba, Athaliah, and Hamutal did not receive the title.¹⁶⁴ Smith discusses only women who are connected to the divided monarchy and does not include any passages outside of the royal archives in which powerful women act.¹⁶⁵

In conclusion, when referring to the *gēbîrâ* of the Judean monarchy, the foremost woman would be the queen mother.¹⁶⁶ She is the one woman named in all the regnal formulas of Judah. She is the first woman recorded in the exile lists. She is punished by

¹⁶² Smith, “‘Queenship’ in Israel,” 144.

¹⁶³ Smith, “‘Queenship’ in Israel,” 145.

¹⁶⁴ Bathsheba’s power is most noted in her ability to influence David’s choice of Solomon as his heir (1 Kgs 1), Solomon bowing before her and seating her on a throne at his right hand (1 Kgs 3:19), and the privilege of crowning Solomon (3:11). The Queen of Sheba is powerful in that she is a reigning monarch who has the funds to travel to Jerusalem and to bring a large and wealthy retinue with her (1 Kgs 10:1-2). Athaliah is the only woman to have functioned in the role of sole monarch over Judah despite the illegitimacy of her reign (2 Kgs 11). Ezekiel describes Hamutal as being the sole power behind placing two of her sons on the throne (Ezek 19). I will discuss each of these women in depth in chapters four and five with the exception of the Queen of Sheba.

¹⁶⁵ If one wishes to argue that the title was suppressed for these particular women, then one would have to also agree that it is possible that the title could have been suppressed for *all* of the queen mothers.

¹⁶⁶ It is possible that the northern kingdom also reserved the term for the queen mother. All references to the *gēbîrâ* as queen mother refer to Judean queen mothers with the exception of Jezebel, whom a *Judean* delegation refers to as *gēbîrâ*.

Yahweh with the king for the exile. Her naming and appearances in the text of 1 and 2 Kings outrank the little to almost no naming and role for the wife of the king. If the queen mother is the foremost woman of the nation, then 1 Kgs 15:13 and 2 Kgs 10:13 become less ambiguous as to whom exactly the text is referring. As a grandmother, Maacah can function as the nominal queen mother and the *gēbîrâ* and the title need not refer only to the mother of the king.

These are not individual women who rose to attain the title of *gēbîrâ*. The *gēbîrâ* is the one woman who served as the preeminent woman of the nation, who is the queen mother. This title is not attributed to her simply biologically bearing the next king but is a court-sanctioned position. The office of *gēbîrâ* is not inalienable as Maacah was removed from it and, therefore, “means more than simply being the king’s mother.”¹⁶⁷ If every queen mother is the foremost of her nation and one can be removed from being *gēbîrâ* as opposed to the status of mother, then the title imbues the mother of the king with a position that the royal court sanctions.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

The mother of the Judean king receives major distinction in the narrator naming her for seventeen of the nineteen Judean kings when few women bear a name in the Hebrew Scriptures. The distinction was more than being a favored woman who had the privilege of bearing the current king. She served her nation in a formal position that garnered her partial blame for the exile of the Judeans. In order to establish that she held

¹⁶⁷ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 61.

¹⁶⁸ I am not making any claims at this juncture as to what exactly that role was, only that the royal court, as a whole or by the king only, sanctioned the role. The intent is not to develop a “comprehensive theory...on the position of *gēbîrâ* as an office of the state” (Ben-Barak; “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 29), only to show its function as an office itself.

a sanctioned position, one has to establish the viability of such a position beyond her function as simply a mother. Setting aside her place in the regnal formulas at this point in the dissertation, one must seek additional support from the ancient Near East and the Hebrew text itself.

Historical evidence exists of powerful and influential queen mothers from nine of ancient Israel's contemporary neighbors: Assyria, Babylonia, Ebla, Egypt, Elam, Hattusa, Sidon, Sumer, and Ugarit. These women functioned in various roles within their societies or kingdoms, establishing a pattern for royal courts of the ancient Near East. These roles were not identical but showed a niche carved out for the mothers of the kings, be it priestess, worshipper-patron, representative of the goddess on earth, administrator, regent, entrepreneur, architect, courtier, or ambassador. The importance and function of the ancient Near Eastern queen mothers lay the groundwork for the legitimacy of the role and influence of the ancient Israelite queen mothers.

The Hebrew text itself testifies to ancient Israel's desire to have a king like the surrounding nations. 1 Samuel 8:19-20 are the words of the Israelites calling for "a king (to be) over (them) so that (they) may also become like the nations." The verse belongs to a larger narrative that tells the story of the establishment of the monarchy in ancient Israel. Although these words cannot be taken as historically accurate for the founding of the ancient Israelite kingdom, as a narrative, the text gives the narrator's views of the formation of the monarchy. If the new government is modeled on the nations, then it is possible that the royal court is also modeled on the nations. Due to the importance of the queen mother among the nations, the structure of the royal Judean house very well could have included the position of the queen mother as perceived from their neighbors.

While the establishment of the monarchy in 1-2 Samuel does not detail the institution of the position of the queen mother, the remainder of the Hebrew Bible gives readers clues as to that position. With the exception of 1 Kgs 11:19; 15:13, and 2 Kgs 10:13, which are ambiguous texts, all *gěbîrôt* are women who function as the foremost woman in her household, the nation, or the ancient Near East. When the text equates the *gěbîrâ* with the queen mothers (specifically Maacah, Jezebel, and Nehushta) and the regnal formulas declare her importance by name, the narrator establishes a formal position for the queen mother, one that the king can remove (such as with Maacah). Maacah, Jezebel, or Nehushta are the only mothers to attain the position of *gěbîrâ*. The regnal formulas indict fifteen women as the foremost women of the nation who were powerful enough to merit the narrator's blame for their roles in the downfall of the Judean monarchy.

CHAPTER THREE

The Theological Framework of 1 and 2 Kings

Only four queen mothers of the divided monarchy make an appearance in 1 and 2 Kings (Maacah, Athaliah, Jezebel, and Nehushta) outside of their naming in the formulas. The queen mothers are most conspicuous and make their greatest impact by their inclusion in the regnal formulas. The narrator lists the names of the queen mothers of the southern kingdom, almost as in passing, but their appearances are nestled within an integral part of the narrator's presentation of a theodicy of the exile through the text of 1 and 2 Kings. The punishment of exile wrought upon ancient Israel is greatly attributed as the fault of the monarchy, who has compromised the kingdom's covenant fidelity with Yahweh. Using the regnal formulas and a prophecy-fulfillment schema, the narrator structures 1 and 2 Kings to lay a framework that theologically blames the ancient Israelite kings for the exile.¹ Before one can address the queen mothers themselves, one should be aware of the narrator's theological platform. Following preliminary considerations

¹ While acknowledging that the regnal formulas present the most consistent structure for 1 and 2 Kings, Cohn calls attention to the composite nature of the books in order to claim that a "quest for a single unambiguous structure is probably futile" (Robert L. Cohn, "The Literary Structure of Kings," *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* [ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010], 109). Cohn suggests Nelson's work that approaches 1 and 2 Kings as a complex of overlapping patterns (Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* [IBC; ed. James Luther Mays; Louisville: John Knox, 1987], 8). Nelson specifically discusses chronology, parataxis, prophecy-fulfillment, the evaluative structure of regnal judgments, and the theme of apostasy and reform (Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 8-12). Cohn includes additional structuring features: type-scenes, verbal repetitions and refrains, and thematic links. According to Cohn, editors used these different patterns and techniques at different points in the books' composition history in order to present harmony and tension to "create its thick intertextual quality" (Cohn, "Literary Structure of Kings," 109).

Without a doubt, 1 and 2 Kings has a variety of structural features. Not all of these patterns contribute to a democratized blame of the monarchy and some do so inconsistently. The two most consistent and overarching structural techniques that depict this theology of blame are the regnal formulas and the theme of prophecy-fulfillment. While espousing the many structuring features and criticizing scholars for focusing on one as if it could singly define the books of Kings, Cohn claims that the regnal formulas and the pattern of prophecy-fulfillment are the two "fundamental structural dynamics of Kings" (Cohn, "Literary Structure of Kings," 116-117).

regarding the Deuteronomistic History, this chapter will investigate the regnal formulas first and the theme of prophecy-fulfillment second. Then a discussion will follow regarding the intertwining of these two main features to present the depiction of the narrative's overarching theology in the books of Kings.

"The So-Called Deuteronomistic History:" Preliminary Considerations

The books of Kings are the end product of what many scholars deem the Deuteronomistic History (DH). Martin Noth produced the foundational work on identifying this narrative history in *The Deuteronomistic History*.² Noth identified Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings as the product of a single Deuteronomistic editor or editors "closely resembling one another in style."³ The use of the "Deuteronomistic" label conveys that the editors' language and thought closely resembled the admonitory speeches and the law in Deuteronomy. Noth imbues these editors with the task of adapting a comprehensive complex of narratives found in the individual books into a whole. The editors' purpose in adapting the complex was "to highlight certain aspects of the traditional material by means of a clearly defined and strongly emphasized theological interpretation of history."⁴

Since Noth's original publication in 1943, the field of study regarding the DH exploded and scholars have extensively written on the topic, confirming, refuting,

² Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; ed. David J. A. Clines, Philip R. Davies, and David M. Gunn; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

³ Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 4.

⁴ Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 4.

revising, and adapting Noth's theory.⁵ As evidenced from the multitude of works on the DH, consensus from scholars is difficult to come by. The most agreement by scholars appears to be the two poles of unity and diversity in the DH.⁶ As stated in the methodological section of the first chapter, this dissertation approaches the books of Kings from a unified standpoint. Gene Rice describes the DH with the helpful image of a great cathedral.⁷ A cathedral that is built over a vast amount of time will demonstrate the many different architectural styles of the time period in which growth took place. Rice writes: "The expert can identify the different styles and trace the stages of the cathedral's growth. Nevertheless, it is to the cathedral as a finished work that one must relate. The Deuteronomistic history exhibits both literary unity and diversity."⁸ Gary N. Knoppers writes: "Because the Deuteronomist's compositional techniques included selection, edition, and composition, the resulting work was not merely a collection of sources, but a coherent work manifesting a deliberate design and a uniformity of purpose."⁹

While acknowledging the many layers and redactions of the DH, the answer sought here is to the question regarding the theology presented in the final form of 1 and

⁵ For a variety of examples regarding the composition of the books of Kings, see Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), and André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern, eds., *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010). Eissfeldt is another example with his detailed pre-Deuteronomistic sources, additions of the Deuteronomists, and additions after the Deuteronomists (Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, An Introduction: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament* [trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 286-301).

⁶ Gary N. Knoppers, "Introduction," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 1-18.

⁷ Gene Rice, *Nations Under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings* (ITC; ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 3.

⁸ Rice, *Nations Under God*, 3.

⁹ Knoppers, "Introduction," 2.

2 Kings. Most scholars recognize the entirety of the DH as a theological work.¹⁰

Ancient Israel's origins, success, and failure as a nation is the overarching theme of the DH. Because it is inspired and shaped by the theology of Deuteronomy, the DH is theological in nature because it

accounts for Israel's successes and failures as the predictable outworkings of Israel's faithfulness to the *bērīt* articulated at Sinai...the history's overarching agenda is to explain Israel's covenant relationship with God, and how the failure of this relationship eventually leads to the nation's demise at the hands of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE.¹¹

The DH is centered on a covenantal understanding of Israel and Yahweh's relationship. The same can be said for 1 and 2 Kings, possibly even more so as it stands at the end of that history, serving as both direct evidence of a rationale for ancient Israel's demise and as the conclusion to ancient Israel's history as a nation.

Regnal Formulas and the Making of Theology

The regnal reports present and evaluate the reign of each king of the divided monarchy according to a particular generic form. The reports follow a general pattern in 1 and 2 Kings and fall into three elements: introductory formulas, the account of the events of the reign, and concluding formulas. While the individual examples of the regnal report may vary, the reports adhere rigidly to these three elements.¹² The account

¹⁰ For examples of scholars who expressly recognize the DH as a theological work, see Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 4, 89; Steven L. McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books: Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 110; Mary E. Mills, *Joshua to Kings: History, Story, Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 105; Sandra L. Richter, "Deuteronomistic History," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 220; Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 6; and Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 206-209.

¹¹ Richter, "Deuteronomistic History," 220.

¹² Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 8. In a few instances, the pattern does not hold due to unusual circumstances at accession or death that necessitate a change in the formulas.

of each king's reign begins and ends with stereotypical formulaic material, which is the regnal formula.¹³ The introductory material consists of the king's name and his date of accession. The date of accession is synchronized with the regnal year of the reigning king of the other kingdom during the era of the divided monarchy. After the demise of the northern kingdom, this synchronization naturally disappears. Only the southern kingdom records the king's age at the time of succession. The length or years of his reign and his chosen capital follow. Then, the text names the mother of the Judean king with the exception of two kings, Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:16) and Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:1). The introductory material ends with a theological evaluation of the king in the eyes of Yahweh.

The second part of the report is the regnal account, which freely narrates the major events of the king's reign. Then, his account is closed with a concluding formula, the third element of the report. The narrator will often mention the king's most notable deeds. Then, the narrator cites other sources for further regnal information regarding the king, such as the rest of the acts of the king located in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel or the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Last, the formula gives a notice of the king's death and burial and follows with the naming of his successor.¹⁴

The regnal reports result in a regular treatment of all the reigns of the kings as a series. The reader moves from one regnal period to the next, often sending the reader

¹³ These formulas are also called regnal resumsés, regnal reports, and summarizing formulas.

¹⁴ For general information regarding the regnal formulas, for example, see Simon J. DeVries, *I Kings* (WBC 12; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Waco: Word Books, 1985) xlvi; Burke O. Long, *I Kings* (FOTL 9; ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 22; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 8; and Jerome T. Walsh, *I Kings* (Berit Olam; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), 207. Eissfeldt addresses possible reasons for particular reigns that lack the concluding formula (*The Old Testament, An Introduction*, 282-283).

from the northern kingdom to the southern kingdom and back again repeatedly.¹⁵ The narrator presents an entire king's reign uninterrupted before turning to the next reign, following one kingdom until chronology dictates a return to the other kingdom, hence the need for the synchronization notice. Jerome T. Walsh uses the example of chain-links to demonstrate how each reign connects to the previous and next reigns.¹⁶ Rarely does material appear between the closing regnal formula of one account and the introductory material of the next reign. When the narrator breaks with convention and material appears between the reigns, it is usually for a narrative reason, such as with the transfer of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha (2 Kgs 2), the account of Athaliah's illegitimate rule (2 Kgs 11), and the declaration of the purpose of the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms (2 Kgs 17:7-23; 21:10-16; and 24:2-4).¹⁷

This intertwining chronological framework links the stories of the two kingdoms. Richard D. Nelson calls the structure a "carrier wave" that "bear(s) the stories told within the open files so that narrative time and chronological time drive each other."¹⁸ The carrying structure of chronology moves the narrative forward by presenting the events of the kings' reign in the regnal accounts. Nelson points out that the synchronization helps to unify the history of the northern and southern kingdoms into the story of a single group of people—Israel.¹⁹ Nelson specifically calls attention to the regnal formulas as paratactic units. These smaller units are placed adjacently in order to build up the larger

¹⁵ Long, *1 Kings*, 22.

¹⁶ Walsh, *1 Kings*, 207.

¹⁷ Richard D. Nelson, "1 and 2 Kings," in *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary* (rev ed; ed. James L. Mays; New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 279; and Walsh, *1 Kings*, 207.

¹⁸ Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 9.

¹⁹ Nelson, "1 and 2 Kings," 279; and Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 9.

whole of the narrative of God's chosen people as a nation.²⁰ Iain W. Provan describes the plot of the books of Kings as Israel's attempt under a monarchy to live as the people of Yahweh in the land promised to Abraham and how Yahweh responds with their successful attempts and, more often, failures. This plot, according to Provan, is worked out gradually through the presentation of each king by the regnal reports.²¹

Regnal Evaluations as Theological Method

Of special interest in these formulas is the theological evaluation each king receives. While there are limited variations in the regnal formulas, the one absolute is the judgment of the narrator. No events in the king's reign may be reported but the narrator still theologically judges the king. In theologically evaluating the king, the narrator shows God as intimately involved in the lives of the kings and the people, giving coherence to the diverse paratactic stories of kings' reigns.²² Anthony F. Campbell explains that the formulas are independent of the dating of the synchronization. The additional material surrounding the judgment formulas either illustrates the judgment or is "merely...worthy of record."²³ The evaluations, therefore, are the "primary communication being sought in this careful accounting of the kings of Israel and Judah."²⁴ Beyond the name of the king and his kingdom, the theological evaluations

²⁰ Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 10.

²¹ Iain W. Provan, *1 & 2 Kings* (OTG; ed. R. N. Whybray; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 27. See also, John Gray, *1 & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; ed. G. Ernest Wright et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 15-16; and Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89.

²² Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings* (AOTC; ed. Patrick D. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 6-7.

²³ Antony F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel 1-2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS 17; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986), 140.

²⁴ Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 140.

seem to be the one element of the reports that is absolutely essential to convey the narrator's message.²⁵

In the evaluations, the formulas show themselves to be more than historical recountings of the kings of ancient Israel or an avenue to relating the chronology of the time period. The judgments levied against the kings provide an avenue for commentary by the narrator through the use Deuteronomistic theology.²⁶ Patricia Dutcher-Walls describes the interaction between the evaluations and the events narrated for kings' reigns as a pronounced dialectic that imbeds Deuteronomistic ideology into the books of Kings. The summaries shape how the reader should view the events, which the narrator supports with the summary of incidents.²⁷ Burke O. Long aptly describes the standards by which these evaluations appraise each king: "how well he observed and supported the primacy of Yahweh and his temple in Jerusalem—or more usually, how a king failed to live up to this trust."²⁸ The theological evaluation is not as formulaic as the introductory and

²⁵ Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 140. According to Campbell, the years of a king's reign are necessary for a synchronistic presentation only as they are not needed for a simple linear presentation (Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, 140 n 3).

²⁶ Elna Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup 349; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 80. Noth criticizes scholars for being one-sided in focusing upon the evaluations. Noth claims that the narrator is especially interested in chronology as the narrator establishes exactly when events take place in relation to each other. The structure of 1 and 2 Kings evidences this relationship as well because continuity is achieved via chronology of the reigns of both the northern and southern kings. The length of their rule and the synchronization of reigns were to supply an unbroken chronology of both monarchies. According to Noth, the narrator, therefore, is not exclusively concerned with evaluating the kings and/or the monarchy as a whole. The narrator seeks to establish a definitive chronology for the purpose of reporting the individual statistics from his sources (Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 18).

²⁷ Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash* (JSOTSup 209; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davis; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 136.

²⁸ Long, *1 Kings*, 26.

concluding framework of the regnal reports. There are, however, recurring motifs that form the basis of these evaluations.²⁹

“Walking in the ways of Jeroboam:” northern regnal evaluations. Every king of the northern monarchy, regardless of how effective his administration was, receives a negative evaluation. All are condemned without exception. The evaluation is repeatedly that the king participated in “the sin of Jeroboam, son of Nebat” (e.g., 1 Kgs 16:26; 2 Kgs 13:2). The apostasy of Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom, determined the nation’s fate. The narrator accuses every king of the remainder of the northern monarchy of the same sin that Jeroboam committed. Even if he manages any achievements or reversals during his reign, the narrator judges that king’s reign against the basic moral failure of Jeroboam. Long describes these repetitive evaluations as a perceived “systemic poison throughout the life of the northern kingdom.”³⁰

The sin of Jeroboam appears to involve unfaithfulness to God, particularly in the worship of other gods. The description of the reason for the northern kingdom’s downfall centers around the Decalogue’s first commandment (Exod 20:2-3; Deut 5:7-10; 6:5) as all the sins cited in 2 Kgs 17:7-23 involve serving other gods. More than a disobedience to a law code, the sin of Jeroboam and the northern kings is their disloyalty to God and refusal to repent.³¹ On the other hand, Nelson and Simon J. DeVries posit

²⁹ Walsh, *1 Kings*, 207.

³⁰ Long, *1 Kings*, 27. See also, Robert L. Cohn, “Characterization in Kings,” *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 92. Cross deems the sin of Jeroboam as *the* crucial event in the history of the northern kingdom (Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973], 279).

³¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion; ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 11.

that this phrase may only mean that the kings continued sacrificing outside of Jerusalem to Yahweh at Dan and Bethel and did not remove the shrines to Yahweh at Bethel, Dan, or anywhere else.³² If Jeroboam wanted to erect competing shrines to keep the people from traveling to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kgs 12:27), then logically he would build Yahwistic cult centers rather than introducing separate gods for the people to worship. Even so, the additional worship centers are in direct violation of Deuteronomic law that demands one central place of worship (Deut 12:7-14; see also 1 Kgs 11:13, 32, 36).³³

“(Attempts at) walking in the ways of David:” southern regnal evaluations. The evaluations for the southern kingdom vary between three possibilities. (1) The redactor may give the kings of Judah *complete approval*. For example, Josiah’s evaluation reads: “He did right in the sight of Yahweh and walked in the way of his father David” (2 Kgs 22:2). Hezekiah is the only other king to receive complete approval (2 Kgs 18:3).

(2) The redactor could also give *qualified approval* for the reigns of the kings. Their sin is usually that they failed to remove the high places. They are faithful to Yahweh but they continue to allow false worship to persist. For example, the account of Amaziah reads: “He did right in the sight of Yahweh . . . But the high places were not removed; still the people sacrificed and made offerings at the high places” (2 Kgs 14:3-

³² DeVries, *1 Kings*, xlvi; and Nelson, “1 and 2 Kings,” 279. Ahab varies slightly in that he is also condemned for his marriage to Jezebel and his worship of Baal, including erecting an altar for Baal in a house for the god. The narrator states that Ahab angered Yahweh more than any king in the north who had reigned before him (1 Kgs 16:30-33).

³³ DeVries, *1 Kings*, xlvi; and Nelson, “1 and 2 Kings,” 279.

4). The redactor approves with qualification Asa (1 Kgs 15:11, 14), Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22:43), and Joash (2 Kgs 12:2-3), to name a few.³⁴

(3) The narrator may also evaluate the king's account *negatively*, such as Jehoiakim's account: "He did evil in the sight of Yahweh, like all his ancestors had done" (2 Kgs 23:37). Other reigns that the redactor deems negative include Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:22), Abijam (1 Kgs 15:3), Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:18), Ahaziah (2 Kgs 8:26), Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:9), and Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:19).

While the northern kings are compared to Jeroboam, an original sinner, the majority of the Judean kings are compared to a righteous ancestor, David, "the king after the deuteronomist's own heart."³⁵ David serves as the prototypical king for the narrator. Because of this picture of a "perfectly obedient anointed one," all kings of Jerusalem are held to his standard.³⁶ The reason for this comparison appears to stem from the Davidic covenant. First Kings 15:4 describes a lamp in Jerusalem for David's sake in order to raise up his son and to establish Jerusalem. First Kings 15:5 then evaluates David himself, doing right in the eyes of Yahweh and not turning aside from the commandments of God with the exception of his injustice to Uriah the Hittite.³⁷ Also, only kings who are of the line of David are compared to him. The rulers of the northern

³⁴ For a study on the connection between kings receiving qualified approval and undergoing foreign oppression, see E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., "Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 231-248

³⁵ von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 217. See also, Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," 93.

³⁶ von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 218, and Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; Peabody: Prince, 1962), 345. Von Rad notes that the origin of this messianic view of David, removed of all the negative aspects of his reign, is difficult to determine but must have been operative during the later revisions of the books of Kings (*The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 218).

³⁷ Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; ed. Donald J. Wiseman; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 48. For examples regarding the continuity of the Davidic dynasty, see 1 Kgs 2:2-4, 24; 3:5-8, 13-14; 4:22-25; 5:7; 8:15-21, 24; 9:4-5; 11:12-13, 32-36, 38-39; 14:7-8; 15:4-5, 11.

kingdom, who are not descendants of David, are compared overwhelmingly with Jeroboam rather than David. Frank Moore Cross writes: “David in Kings is the symbol of fidelity, Jeroboam the symbol of infidelity.”³⁸ Considering the Judean kings’ biological link to David, they are then subject to this Davidic ideal. Unfortunately, the majority of the kings allow idolatry to continue like the kings of the North. Unlike the northern rulers, however, the narrator judges them un/faithful to the ways of David.

“Doing evil or right:” covenant in/fidelity and the regnal evaluations. The evaluations of both kingdoms are based on the criteria of covenant fidelity and loyalty to Yahweh. Dutcher-Walls states: “Virtually all of the regnal formulas use the basic judgment of the king’s doing right or evil in the sight of Yahweh . . . they bring the ideology imbedded in the narrative into the foreground and use it to shape the impact of the whole account.”³⁹ This shaping consists of the retelling of some event, or multiple events, of the king’s reign. The text narrates success for the rulers who remain faithful to Yahweh and gave exclusive support to Yahwistic worship in Jerusalem.⁴⁰ The narrator asks the question of whether the king recognized Jerusalem as the one legitimate place of worship versus sacrificing on the high places instead or in addition. Gerhard von Rad writes that the evaluations are solely a result of the answer to this question.⁴¹ Hezekiah and Josiah are the only two kings to receive complete approval (2 Kgs 18:3 and 2 Kgs

³⁸ Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 282.

³⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric*, 135-136.

⁴⁰ J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 251.

⁴¹ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 336.

22:2, respectively), apparently due to their centralization of sacrificial worship in Jerusalem.

The appraisal is religious and does not take into account any political, financial, or military success.⁴² Each king is not assessed based on his own particular situation or the problems that accompany it. Several kings have reigns either too short to accomplish anything substantial for good or evil or have no deeds narrated and are still judged. For example, the Zechariah account contains only his assassination at the hands of Shallum six months into his reign (2 Kgs 15:8-11). The narrator does not directly blame the assassination on Zechariah's actions but deems his demise the result of the prophecy to Jehu promising only four generations of his dynasty (2 Kgs 15:12). Zechariah inherits both Jeroboam's evil and Jehu's doom regardless of his actions and short tenure.⁴³

While the books of Kings offer general political concerns, the text casts the occasional narrated political events in a theological light. The evaluations do not come from "drawing up a kind of balance-sheet of achievements and shortcomings."⁴⁴ The evaluations ultimately fall into "either-or" terms of the king's cultic decision. The sum of the king's reign is not the narrator's concern, only that one critical question of covenant fidelity. For example, Omri was an accomplished king, the only king to establish a dynasty in the North and the builder of the city of Samaria (1 Kgs 16:23-28). His concluding formula speaks of the "might which he showed" (1 Kgs 16:27). He is a victim of the original sin of Jeroboam and did even worse than all of his predecessors. If

⁴² Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 259; Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 10; and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 337.

⁴³ Cohn, "Characterization in Kings," 92.

⁴⁴ von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 206.

his judgment is especially negative due to the building of the rival capital of Samaria, then the narrator does not make this connection explicit.

Von Rad argues that this seemingly harsh criteria regarding one central issue is reflective of the theological attitude of the books of Kings as a whole. Von Rad admits that the complex work is narrow in its scope but that is because it is confessional. The cult of Yahweh stood or fell upon exclusive fidelity where Yahweh resided symbolically for ancient Israel and where God interacted with the people through the cult.⁴⁵ Either the king was acquitted for his faithfulness to the cult of Yahweh or was condemned for not doing so regardless of the king's otherwise success. According to von Rad, the narrator assumes the king had the freedom to choose to institute Yahwistic-only worship.⁴⁶ The "existence or non-existence" of Israel depended upon the king's choice, and the narrator, therefore, uses that choice to express a "comprehensive confession of Israel's guilt."⁴⁷ The exile was not the result of failure to repel the invading armies through military means or to negotiate politically with the leaders of the foreign nations but that the kings expressly rejected the Mosaic covenant and suffered the consequences.⁴⁸

The king's relationship to Mosaic law is absolutely critical to understanding the theological evaluations. Deuteronomy focuses on the purity of worship of Yahweh in a central location (later Jerusalem). Israel must cut out all Canaanite worship practices and remove the high places. The narrator of 1 and 2 Kings cites Moses frequently as

⁴⁵ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 337.

⁴⁶ von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 206; and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 337.

⁴⁷ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 337.

⁴⁸ Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 10.

authorization for the commands of responsibility for the king (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:6; 21:9).⁴⁹ “Doing right in the eyes of Yahweh” implies that the narrator judges the kings based on “the law of Moses” (cf. 1 Kgs 2:3; 3:14) and God’s covenant with the people. Donald J. Wiseman argues that the narrator believes that the Mosaic law was “known or knowable,” even if frequently forgotten (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:13, 35).⁵⁰ The law was emphasized at significant events in the monarchy, such as the coronation of kings (e.g., 2 Kgs 11:12) and was reaffirmed during times of crisis (e.g., 2 Kgs 11:17; 23:3).⁵¹ Von Rad notes that the evaluation of the king was dependent upon the king’s devotion to the Mosaic law: “Did the kings discern and comply with the will of Jahweh promulgated by Moses? As we know, the answer is No—the decision of the kings was taken against the revealed will of Jahweh and for evil.”⁵² The keeping of the law and the purity of the cult as described in Deuteronomy is the standard by which the narrator judges the monarchies for “good” or for “evil.”⁵³

Mentioned with regard to Jeroboam’s sin, the first commandment (Exod 20:2-3; Deut 5:7-10; 6:5) of the Decalogue applies to the monarchy as a whole. Wiseman

⁴⁹ Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 3.

⁵⁰ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20. Wiseman argues that the judgments are based on more than “temple services in Jerusalem” but also on the removal of the high places, cultic objects, and cultic priests (*1 and 2 Kings*, 48-49).

⁵¹ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20. Wiseman also calls attention to changes in national leadership in the Deuteronomistic history as a whole (e.g., Josh 8:30-35).

⁵² von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 339.

⁵³ von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 206; and Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20. Wolff notes that the Davidic covenant as stipulated by the Nathan oracle (2 Sam 7) was contingent on obedience to Mosaic law in Deuteronomy. The oracle did not protect the monarchy as the narrator measured both the northern and southern kings by the Mosaic covenant. When the Mosaic covenant was ignored, then, the Nathan oracle was no longer at work (Hans Walter Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work,” in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (trans. Frederick C. Prussner; ed. Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 86.

observes that the failure to keep Yahweh's commandments leads to a propensity for worshipping other gods, a blatant break with the first commandment.⁵⁴ Terence E. Fretheim writes: "The First Commandment is the focus of what it means to 'forsake' the covenant (Deut. 29:25-26; 1 Kings 11:9-11; 2 Kings 17:15, 35-38)."⁵⁵ This principle commandment receives constant attention in the theological evaluations of the kings as they repeatedly refer to the sin of Jeroboam and speak of the kings not removing the high places. The apostasy of the kings seems to be linked to the first commandment to ensure the oneness of God and the fidelity to God alone.⁵⁶

The King as the Keeper of the Kingdom

The emphasis of 1 and 2 Kings is clearly upon the regnal formulas, making the figure of the king the central human character in the narrative. Combined with the emphasis on the Mosaic law, the king is to be "the custodian *par excellence* of the Mosaic tradition."⁵⁷ Throughout Israel's history, the people most responsible for keeping the covenant and leading the people of Yahweh are the kings and the prophets.⁵⁸ The theological evaluations evidence expectation that the king should exert his power in maintaining the purity and promulgation of the Yahwistic cult.⁵⁹ The fault of both the

⁵⁴ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20. For examples of the denunciation of idolatry and worship at other shrines, see 1 Kgs 11:1-6, 9-13; 12:33; 13:2-5; 14:9; 15:12-15; 16:31-33; 21:26; 22:43, 46.

⁵⁵ Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 11.

⁵⁶ Pierre Buis, *Le Livre des Rois* (SB; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1997), 28; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 8; and Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20.

⁵⁷ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 40. Gray notes 2 Kgs 23 in which Josiah dispenses the covenant and parallels Moses and Joshua in doing so.

⁵⁸ Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, *EBC* 4:7.

⁵⁹ Gary N. Knoppers, "Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History: The Case of Kings," *CBQ* 63, 3 (2001): 407.

Assyrian and Babylonian exiles lies in the hands of the kings even though the people are exiled rather than the kings only losing their vaulted position. This seemingly inverted logic is the result of more than a collective conscience that Israel demonstrates, although collective thinking rather than individualism is indeed at work.⁶⁰ The kings break not only this commandment but reject the command of the *shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is the LORD alone” (Deut 6:4). The kings persistently ignore this essential and central command and the nation’s destruction hinges upon that disregard.

The king stands at the head of the nation. He is responsible for God’s people and their relationship with God as their anointed king. So while the one-sided judgment upon the king’s cultic decisions appears unfair, the king serves as an intermediary between Yahweh and the people. Mary E. Mills describes the king as the “mirror image of society.”⁶¹ The king’s body and character are intimately linked with Israel as a whole. Mills argues that the king is an image of God for Israel as proxy for God’s place as ruler of the people.⁶² A king’s role was to ensure the spiritual well-being of the nation and, therefore, he either fulfills or fails in that role.⁶³ The narrator tasks the king with both

⁶⁰ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 40; Knoppers, “Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History,” 407; and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 344.

⁶¹ Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 127.

⁶² Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 127.

⁶³ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 40; and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 344-345. Von Rad uses this notion of the king as a “key-position” between the people and Yahweh as partial proof that the narrator did not take a low view of the monarchy. The evaluations were not a result of the narrator’s opinion of the institution of kingship but of the king’s actions and cultic decisions (*Old Testament Theology*, 339). Gray argues, as well, that the narrator was accepting of the monarchy, evidenced in the narrator’s high view of Hezekiah and Josiah. The narrator approved of kingship as long as the monarch fulfilled the ideal of Davidic kingship (*I & II Kings*, 41).

promotion and defense of the temple in Jerusalem; he is to “secure both *Kultuseinheit* and *Kultusreinheit*.”⁶⁴ Even those kings who receive qualified approval, allowing the high places to remain, did not do “well enough.”⁶⁵ The persistence of their rulers sway the people from the nation’s covenantal understanding of Yahweh.⁶⁶ Pierre Buis argues the people have rights and the kings must adhere to the covenant for their sake.⁶⁷ The king’s actions, then, could either save or condemn the nation as the king’s sins are the people’s sins.⁶⁸

Noth is quick to dismiss criticism of the narrator for “misunderstanding” and “misevaluating” the individual kings when the narrator is describing the history of the monarchy as a whole. Any positive actions of individual rulers did not affect the result.⁶⁹ Of particular interest is 2 Kgs 21:10-16, in which the narrator expressly blames the Judean king, Manasseh, for the exile of the southern kingdom. The narrator presents a collective viewpoint of blame with the kings leading the people away from God’s commands prior to this proclamation regarding Manasseh. After Manasseh, the narrator becomes particularly interested in the individual Judean monarchs and their involvement in the coming Babylonian exile. The last kings of Judah are compared to Manasseh for

⁶⁴ Knoppers, “Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History,” 406.

⁶⁵ Knoppers, “Rethinking the Relationship between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History,” 407.

⁶⁶ Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 8.

⁶⁷ Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 27.

⁶⁸ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 41. Wiseman notes that the kings’ actions had affected both the welfare of his family and his successors, leading to continual strings of repetitive breakdowns in the king’s relationship and, by extension, the people’s relationship with Yahweh (*I and 2 Kings*, 20).

⁶⁹ Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 63-64.

their non-Yahwistic practices, including rebuilding the high places, altars to Baal, and Asherah poles.⁷⁰ At minimum, the evaluations serve to place *individual* kings “into categories of inadequacy.”⁷¹

Long offers an alternative to the collective versus individual presentation. Most of the kings are stereotyped as being like or unlike one another, such as the northern kings’ comparison to Jeroboam and the southern kings’ comparison to David and later Manasseh. Long argues that the narrator is not hiding individuality in these collective judgments. These comparisons are careful cross references that transcend the chronologically locked regnal reports. The evaluations are coupled with the longer passages that focus on the cultic in/fidelity of the kings and “weave a metahistorical pattern of analogies and repetitions, a system of echoes and anticipations which unify the work at a conceptual level apart from the constraints of time and space.”⁷²

The repetitive evaluations are verdicts on the entirety of the monarchy, according to Noth.⁷³ The rare exceptions to the qualified and negative evaluations suggest “that the monarchy *per se* could have been a positive factor in Israel’s history but in fact served only as a catalyst for its downfall.”⁷⁴ Similar to Long, the narrative, then, acknowledges the individual kings as noted by the separate reports and the focus upon the acts of Jeroboam and Manasseh as the main cause of the exiles. The repetitions of the judgments and the repetitions of the similar actions bring about a collective view of the monarchy.

⁷⁰ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 6; and Wiseman, *I and 2 Kings*, 50.

⁷¹ Cohn, “Characterization in Kings,” 92.

⁷² Long, *I Kings*, 26.

⁷³ Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 63-64.

⁷⁴ Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 63-64.

For the most part, Manasseh's sins are a mirror to all the sins of the kings of Judah, albeit on a grander scale. The narrator has reached a threshold with Manasseh's actions. The sins of the kings were becoming more and more entrenched and any king prior to Manasseh could have remedied that ingrained sin. Manasseh's actions, however, become too much for the narrator and he stands at the head of the collective actions and disregard for the laws of Yahweh of the monarchy.

Conclusion

The formulas are summaries that shape the incidents of the kings' reigns, which then contribute to the text's ideological depiction of the monarchy. The primary concern of 1 and 2 Kings is a relationship between a sovereign God and a responsible people and focuses upon the loyalty, or mostly infidelity, of the kings and the people to God. With election comes responsibility, on the part of the kings and the people. Solomon even acknowledges that Israel will not always succeed as a chosen people (1 Kgs 8). The books of Kings present the story of the failure of God's chosen. The kings and the people do not fulfill their responsibility in keeping the law as laid out in Deuteronomy.⁷⁵ The direct result of the overwhelming disloyalty and irresponsibility is punishment through exile. Boldly declaring God's verdict, the narrator pronounces the regnal reports, especially the formulas themselves, as if God has delivered this decision to the narrator, giving full credence to God's allowing the northern and southern kingdoms to be destroyed.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Steven L. McKenzie, *NIDB* 3:531; and Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89.

⁷⁶ Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 15. See also, von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 206.

Prophecy-Fulfillment as Theological Justification

The Mosaic covenant promises the expulsion of the nation for their rejection of God. Deuteronomy 28:63 is explicit in its warning of ejection from the land should the Israelites fail to keep the covenant. In many occurrences in the text, Yahweh's prophetic words of judgment have dramatically affected the course of ancient Israel's history, particularly this word of destruction and exile in Deut 28. Throughout history, the prophets have proclaimed that Israel's apostasy is the basic reason for God's judgment of the nation's division, destruction, and exile.⁷⁷ The theme of prophecy and fulfillment serves as one of several structural features of 1 and 2 Kings. The prophets repeatedly announce judgments upon kings and particular people and these words of judgment find their fulfillment in time in the narrative.⁷⁸ Prophecy-fulfillment functions in two particular ways in the books of Kings. On a micro-level, specific words of judgment are pronounced in specific situations in 1 and 2 Kings. God's word of promise is shown repeatedly not to fail through these particular prophecies. On a macro-level, the kings' and the people's apostasy bring about God's promise of exile should they break the covenant. As Yahweh's word has been proven individually, Yahweh's word stands true for the promises of Deut 28 for the nation.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Birch, *Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 277.

⁷⁸ Nelson, "1 and 2 Kings," 279.

⁷⁹ The theology as covered in this chapter demonstrates a direct correlation between sin and punishment. There are instances, however, in which a king is not punished for not keeping the covenant. For instance, Manasseh reigns for fifty-five years, seemingly enjoying a long and rich reign while receiving the most scathing regnal report. DeVries argues that God will mete out punishment but the punishment may occur upon the person's posterity (*1 Kings*, xlv). For example, Solomon dies in peace and with wealth and honor. One can then understand the division of the kingdom under his son, Rehoboam, as punishment due to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:12) (*1 Kings*, xlv). Von Rad notes that Yahweh should have exiled the northern kingdom during Jeroboam's reign due to his sin (*Problem of the Hexateuch*, 213). The divided nation is not swept into exile with the first bad king or even with the worst king to reign but God punishes the

northern monarchy first and then the southern kingdom centuries after their initial infraction against the covenant.

Von Rad extends this notion of delayed punishment to claim that the postponement is the mercy of Yahweh. Speaking confessionally, he asserts that Yahweh could see even the “comparative” goodness found even in reprobate kings (see Ahab’s repentance [1 Kgs 21:29]; Jehu’s pleasing acts [2 Kgs 10:30; 15:12], and Jehoahaz’s prayers [2 Kgs 13:23; 14:26]) (*Problem of the Hexateuch*, 213). As for Judah, the narrator primarily focuses on the nation’s disobedience while acknowledging God’s mercy. Divine restraint and patience are evident over a much longer period despite repeated sin (*Problem of the Hexateuch*, 215). Von Rad and Patterson and Austel note that the narrator plays intentionally with the tension between sin-punishment and mercy. These two principles are mutual in shaping the history of Judah by highlighting both the Mosaic and Davidic covenants. The historian presents the causality of failure on the part of the kings to keep the Mosaic covenant but Yahweh also keeps the prophetic promise of the Davidic covenant. Yahweh’s word moves in history to control and punish but to also uphold the Davidic promise through the end of the book (von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 219; Patterson and Austel, *EBC* 4:8-9). Von Rad points out the repeated references to the Davidic covenant as evidence of God’s extended mercy throughout the books of Kings (1 Kgs 9:5; 11:13, 32, 23; 2 Kgs 8:19) (von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 215). Cross follows von Rad by noting the contrasting themes of the sin of Jeroboam and the faithfulness of David. The two themes reflect different theological stances: (1) grace and hope due to royal ideology stemming from the Davidic promise and David’s establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem and (2) judgment on Judah for their apostasy and judgment on the northern kingdom for Jeroboam’s rival shrines in Dan and Bethel (Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 282-284).

Many scholars note the Davidic covenant as grounds for Yahweh’s delay in punishment. For example, Long combines both long-suffering mercy and the Davidic promise (1 Kgs 11:34-36; 21:29; 2 Kgs 17:13; 22:18-20; cf. 2 Sam 7) as reason for the slowness of the coming end (*I Kings*, 29-30). McKenzie cites divine election as the rationale for the endurance of Judah and the Davidic line. Yahweh must preserve his own elect among the nations. McKenzie engages 1 Kgs 8 to demonstrate the emphasis placed upon this monarchy. The prayer of Solomon during the Temple dedication stresses the nation’s status as a people of Yahweh and petitions God for continued mercy based upon that status (McKenzie, *NIDB* 3:531; see also, Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89). For more examples of Yahweh’s election of Israel, see 1 Kgs 6:13 and 8:51-53.

Fretheim and Wiseman note that the narrator presents God as a deliverer, giving the people hope for restoration (Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 12-14; and Wiseman, *I and 2 Kings*, 21; see also, Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 3). Scholars have interpreted the release of Jehoiachin as a sign of potential restoration of the monarchy and the nation (for example, see Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* [SBT 9; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953], 74-91). Brueggemann traces the motif of “good” throughout the DH, emphasizing Yahweh offering “good” toward Israel throughout her history. After Evil-Merodach releases and pardons Jehoiachin, he speaks kindly or “good” to the Judean king. According to Brueggemann, the house of David, therefore, endures and the reader can trust the “good” word of Yahweh (Walter Brueggemann, “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historian,” *Int* 22, 4 [Oct 1968]: 387-402).

Others see the ending of 2 Kings as a sign of judgment against the house of David (for example, see Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 12, 74, 98; and Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work,” 85-86). The most cited reason for judgment against David is the parallel of Mephibosheth eating at David’s table (2 Sam 9:13). He is the last of Saul’s dynasty and he is a ward of David and relinquishes any claim on that inheritance (2 Sam 19:5-31) (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 13). By eating at Evil-Merodach’s table, Jehoiachin, therefore, is a ward of the Babylonian king and no longer has a claim upon the Davidic covenant or the Judean monarchy. The editor does not give an explanation for Jehoiachin’s release but Nelson cites parataxis as the reason for the appearance of such a “lame” ending to 2 Kings. Since parataxis places items adjacently to build up the whole, items are presented without hierarchy or climax, finishing a story without a conclusion. The larger whole determines how the end should be interpreted (Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 10). Nelson does not detail what the paratactic structure means for the ending of 2 Kings but insinuates that Jehoiachin’s release should be read in light of divine punishment for the nation’s disobedience.

Prophecy as Proven Word

The words of Yahweh find fulfillment in Israel's history and have not failed. Von Rad writes: "The word of Yahweh is thus related to historical events by the fact that once he has spoken, his word always and invariably achieves its purpose in history by virtue of its own inherent power."⁸⁰ Fretheim notes that a characteristic of the DH is that, through the prophets, God's spoken word shapes history.⁸¹ Prophecy is a "history-creating force."⁸² Prophets are "harbingers of crisis" as they warn the people of the dangers if they do not return to the covenant (1 Kgs 11:1-13, 38-39; 18:21; 2 Kgs 17:13), thereby creating a rationale for both author and reader when the warnings become concrete and are implemented.⁸³

The narrator intertwines the prophets' missions and the kings' lives. Prophets announced the word of Yahweh to the nation and often directed those words to its leaders and kings. Wiseman states that each period of Israel's history yielded a prophet who acted as a spokesperson for God and served the important function of reminding the kings, leaders, and the people of the requirements of the covenant (1 Kgs 1:22; 11:29-39; 14:1-18, 12:21-24, 13:1-32, 16:1-4).⁸⁴ Long notes that in

the formulas (e.g., 12:15; 16:1-4, 12; 22:38), across regnal periods (11:11, 31-37; 12:15; cf. 13:2 with 2 Kings 22-23, or 19:18 with 2 Kgs 10:28), the divine word

⁸⁰ Von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 208.

⁸¹ Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*; 10; see also Long, *1 Kings*, 29; Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89.

⁸² Long, *1 Kings*, 29; von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 221; Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 23.

⁸³ Long, *1 Kings*, 29. For examples of retribution on wrongdoers, see 1 Kgs 8:33, 35, 46; 14:10-11; 15:30; 16:2-4, 7, 13, 19; 21:21-24.

⁸⁴ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 23.

not only comes true, it seems to push and motivate the actors in the drama, announce the turns, and shape the tale (e.g., 17:1-6; 18:1-2).⁸⁵

Von Rad surveys eleven specific incidents of prophecy that find their fulfillment in 1 and 2 Kings⁸⁶ and argues that this survey stands as a general outline of the theological structure of 1 and 2 Kings. Through the theological structure, which von Rad calls a “system of prophetic prediction,”⁸⁷ the editor confronts the reader with a “self-fulfilling relationship between the divinely inspired prophecy and the historical occurrence.”⁸⁸ God’s promise shapes the history of Israel and, thus, Yahweh’s word is unconditional, whether to the people or to David (Deut 4:31; Judg 2:1; 1 Sam 12:22; 2 Sam 7:16; 2 Kgs 13:23). It is not another force or the work itself which moves history but Yahweh himself.⁸⁹

Prophetic Words from Deuteronomy

The prophecy-fulfillment schema demonstrates God’s movement in history through the prophetic narrative in 1 and 2 Kings. The promises of retribution for disobedience in Deut 28, therefore, eventually find their fulfillment, which occurs in the text in the latter part of 2 Kings. Given the influence of the Deuteronomic law code upon the author(s) and/or editor(s), the kings and the people have blatantly broken the first commandment and, therefore, God’s promises of destruction must follow. Von Rad

⁸⁵ Long, *1 Kings*, 29.

⁸⁶ The texts surveyed are as follows: 2 Sam 7:13 and 1 Kgs 8:20; 1 Kgs 11:19 and 1 Kgs 12:15; 1 Kgs 13 and 2 Kgs 23:16-18; 1 Kgs 14:6 and 1 Kgs 15:29; 1 Kgs 16:1 and 16:12; Josh 6:26 and 1 Kgs 16:34; 1 Kgs 22:17 and 22:35; 1 Kgs 21:21 and 21:27-29; 2 Kgs 1:6 and 1:17; 2 Kgs 21:10 and 24:2; and 2 Kgs 22:15 and 23:30 (Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 209-211). See also, Gray, *I & II Kings*, 17-19.

⁸⁷ Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 208.

⁸⁸ Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 211.

⁸⁹ Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 24; and Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*; 12.

writes “(T)he Deuteronomist gave the historical course of events . . . its theological proof precisely by means of a whole structure of constantly promulgated prophetic predictions and their corresponding fulfilments[sic].”⁹⁰

The law code in Deuteronomy serves as a lens for the narrator and the readers to “measure and evaluate the meaning of historical events.”⁹¹ The Mosaic code in both Exod 20 and Deut 5 demands fidelity to Yahweh alone. Ancient Israel struggled with religious syncretism in its tribal and national eras. The acceptance of other gods was more than unacceptable; it was *punishable* as this syncretism was “a fatal threat to Israel’s integrity as God’s covenant people and to its political existence.”⁹² Rice states that it is in the monarchical era that syncretism is most detrimental to the nation. The DH as a whole demonstrates direct consequences for the breaking of the commandments, particularly the acceptance of syncretism, which manifests itself as political devastation.⁹³

Deuteronomy specifically details two results the ancient Israelites may face in relation to their covenant fidelity. Once they have entered the promised land, they will either encounter blessing for their obedience or cursing for their disobedience to the commands of the Mosaic covenant (Deut 27-28). Obedience leads to prosperity, rewards, and blessings while disobedience leads to curses and disaster upon the people and the land.⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 27-28 operate on the principle of retributive justice. Long

⁹⁰ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 340.

⁹¹ Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 105.

⁹² Rice, *Nations Under God*, 2.

⁹³ Rice, *Nations Under God*, 2.

⁹⁴ Gray, *I & II Kings*, 15-16; Long, *I Kings*, 30; and Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 105.

describes the results of dis/obedience as either one of life (blessings) or death (curses).⁹⁵ Yahweh, therefore, has revealed his commandments to Israel and presented, in detail, the results of their religious disobedience which are “heavy punishments” and “condemning the nation to extinction.”⁹⁶ Covenant infidelity requires judgment by God.⁹⁷ The text foreshadows the end of the nation through Deut 27-28’s presentation of blessings and curses.

Throughout the books that comprise the DH, the leaders of ancient Israel and the people have the opportunity to worship Yahweh properly but continually fail to do so. The books of Kings read as a long list of covenantal failures on the part of the nation. These repeated failures throughout the DH result in a nullification of ancient Israel’s occupation of the land. Second Kings clearly provides a picture of dire separation between Israel’s leaders and Yahweh from Manasseh’s rule until the end of the monarchy. In doing so, the narrator prepares the reader for the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile. Deuteronomy then provides a “backdrop of political theology in front of which events in time take place and in relation to which they can be

⁹⁵ Long, *1 Kings*, 30.

⁹⁶ Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 208. See also, Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89. For examples of exhortations to keep the commandments, see 1 Kgs 3:14; 6:12; 8:57-61; 9:4; 11:10-11, 38; 14:8; 15:3, 5, 11; 22:43.

⁹⁷ Fretheim approaches the destruction of the two kingdoms not so much as punishment but, through a wisdom/creation view, as natural consequence. Apostasy itself sows the seeds of the destruction and brings disaster upon the apostates (1 Kgs 9:9; 2 Kgs 22:16, 20). According to Fretheim, consequences as a result of sin are part of the created moral order. God is not exempt from this created order and is the entity that initiates the consequences (*First and Second Kings*, 11).

measured.”⁹⁸ Ancient Israel’s covenant and constitution were only “partially achieved in time and place and finally annulled.”⁹⁹

The books of Kings serve as a living testament to the outworking of Deut 28 as the kings bring curses upon them and the nation rather than the promised blessing of obedience (Deut 27). Deuteronomy’s prophetic word, especially Deut 28:63, is fulfilled by the punishment of both the northern and southern kingdoms in the form of destruction and exile.¹⁰⁰ Retributive justice is central to the prophetic narratives of 1 and 2 Kings as the Scriptures repeatedly forewarn the people about covenant infidelity (Deut 29:25; 31:6-8, 16; 32:26-27; 1 Kgs 19:10; 2 Kgs 11:12; 17:14-20; 18:12).¹⁰¹ The text is quite clear that both kingdoms are destroyed for their disobedience (2 Kgs 17, 21, 24). Even though Manasseh stands as the fulcrum for Judah’s destruction, the books of Kings demonstrate the prophetic principle of punishment tied to disobedience and reward to obedience. The northern kingdom is doomed from the moment Jeroboam is crowned but the southern kingdom can no longer stand in part due to Manasseh and in part for the repeated infidelity of the Judean monarchs.¹⁰²

Deuteronomistic Judgment in Action

The narrator does not leave the reader to piece together the paratactic units and to discover the whole on the reader’s account. Second Kings 17:7-23 and 24:2-4 describe

⁹⁸ Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 105.

⁹⁹ Mills, *Joshua to Kings*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ McKenzie, *NIDB* 3:531; and von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 339-340.

¹⁰¹ Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 21.

¹⁰² McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 110; Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 89; and Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20-21.

the downfall of the northern and southern kingdoms and the rationale for that destruction. Second Kings 17 describes in detail how the northern kingdom's offenses against the commandments and the covenant brought these consequences of disaster. Von Rad notes that the rationale is premised on the principles of dis/obedience from Deuteronomy.¹⁰³ This rationale reads as a theological commentary on ancient Israel's fate.

Framed by an inclusio of exile (2 Kgs 17:6, 23b), the nation is accused of not renouncing foreign gods who have infiltrated their lives and not removing the places of worship for these gods. Of all these offenses, the sin of Jeroboam, a Deuteronomistic sin (2 Kgs 17:21-23), is the culmination of the northern kingdom's transgressions. Second Kings 17:13 and 20 call Judah to account as if warning Judah that their destruction is imminent. One can extend the epilogue to the northern monarchy's demise to the rationale for Judah's pending downfall.¹⁰⁴ The main theme of divine retribution should serve as a warning to Judah, especially as the narrator indicts the southern kingdom in northern monarchy's epilogue. Yet, Judah does not learn the lesson and receives her own retribution for the same reasons—the choice not to keep the Mosaic law.

Conclusion

While many structuring techniques are at work in 1 and 2 Kings, the two features that consistently present the overarching theology of the books are the regnal formulas and the prophecy-fulfillment schema. The two structures independently move in the text

¹⁰³ Von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 214.

¹⁰⁴ Long, *1 Kings*, 27; and Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 20.

but intersect to produce a view of the order of history, which is a rationale for the exile and who is at fault for that exile.¹⁰⁵

The regnal formulas serve as both a means to move the narrative forward and to comment theologically on the events of the kings' reigns and the nations as a whole. The theological evaluations located within the formulas function as the primary means for the narrator to judge the religious effectiveness of the king. The evaluations then serve as a lens by which one understands the historical events of the kings' reigns. These evaluations are overwhelmingly negative, which points toward failure on the part of the vast majority of the kings. That failure is particularly one of covenant infidelity. All of the kings of the northern kingdom are deficient for following in Jeroboam's ways, which was failure to centralize the cult be it through removal of foreign gods or non-sanctioned Yahwistic sanctuaries. The southern kingdom repeats the same mistakes throughout its many reigns, that of allowance of foreign gods and their high places. Manasseh is the turning point of tolerance for the kingdom's sins and the southern state is doomed to exile like her sister. Both kingdoms are punished due to their rulers. Jeroboam and Manasseh are not the only culprits as the majority of the kings, both southern and northern, default on their covenantal obligations. The king is the central character of the narrative and he was responsible for keeping the covenant, which ensured the success of the kingdom. When the kings shirked their duties, the entire nation was punished.

Deuteronomy 28:63 warns of the punishment for covenant infidelity, mainly that of destruction and exile from the land. This prophetic warning finds its final fulfillment in the destruction and exile of both the southern and northern kingdoms. On an

¹⁰⁵ Cohn deems their intersection to be one of a "collision" ("Literary Structure of Kings," 116-117).

individual level in 1 and 2 Kings, the pattern of prophecy-fulfillment serves as a reminder and proof that God's word is definite and propels history. For the DH, the prophecies of Deut 28 are eventually played out with the exile of Judah in 2 Kgs 24-25. Ignoring or blatantly breaking the first commandment of the Decalogue brings disaster. The repeated disregard for the covenant results in Yahweh's hand moving against the nations so that they would reap the consequences of breaking the covenant.

The regnal formulas and prophecy-fulfillment schema are, in effect, a theodicy for the exile. The editors of the text probably pieced together the final forms of the books of Kings during the exile with the shadow of the destruction of the northern and southern kingdoms looming heavily over them. These events were "heavy with theological import" and needed an expression of their cause.¹⁰⁶ These two books function as a means of describing how the kings ignored their covenantal obligations, how the people followed after their leaders, and how these actions resulted in the divine punishment of the exile.¹⁰⁷ The kings are central in the reception of critique. The history of their reigns is not as important as the theological evaluation of those reigns. Marvin A. Sweeney writes that Kings is a work of theodicy "insofar as it defends the notion of divine righteousness by arguing that the people and especially its kings—and not YHWH—were

¹⁰⁶ Von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ As evidenced by the earlier discussion regarding the regnal formulas, 1 and 2 Kings focuses upon the responsibilities of the kings and their failure to keep the covenant and to properly lead the people. One should note that the kings are not the only leaders who failed the people and/or the law. For example, see the support of the priest Abiathar and the army commander Joab for Adonijah's kingship (1 Kgs 1); Rehoboam's young attendants (1 Kgs 12); the unnamed lying prophet (1 Kgs 13); Ahab's court prophets who worship Baal (1 Kgs 18); the false prophets who advise Ahab (1 Kgs 22); and the greed of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (2 Kgs 5). While these instances occur, the narrator obviously focuses upon the kings' misdeeds.

at fault for the destruction and exiles of Israel and Judah.”¹⁰⁸ The exile of Judah is the books’ central concern and the northern kingdom’s destruction serves as an example, proof that Yahweh’s word is indeed effective. One must observe the Mosaic law; the elect of Yahweh are obligated and bound to the Sinai covenant. Yahweh is the “divine patron and protector of Israel,” so it is the sins of the people, their covenant infidelity, that is the “fundamental cause” of Assyria and Babylonia’s success.¹⁰⁹ In theorized words of the narrator, von Rad asks, “(H)ow had all this come about and how could it have become for Jahweh to reject his people?”¹¹⁰ The answer is simple: the fault was not Yahweh’s but the people’s and especially the kings as the central focus on 1 and 2 Kings is upon the rulers’ covenant fidelity.

¹⁰⁸ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 3. See also, Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 342.

CHAPTER FOUR

Worship and Power Gone Wrong? The Queen Mothers of the Divided Monarchy

To a modern audience, the queen mothers of the divided monarchy are shining examples of empowered women who hold high positions of political and religious worth uncharacteristic of a patriarchal world. The narrator of the books of Kings would disagree with such a positive view of these women. The narrator acknowledges the powerful position of the queen mothers but presents them in a negative light. Where the queen mothers appear, their actions are characteristic of the kings whom the narrator blames for the nation's demise. As part of the monarchy, therefore, the queen mothers in general are responsible partially for the downfall of the nation.

In order to demonstrate the queen mothers' culpability according to the narrator, first, I will explore their appearances within the regnal formulas as the formulas are the narrator's main vehicle for validating Yahweh's punishment upon the divided monarchy for their covenant infidelity. Second, I will investigate the functions of the queen mothers of the divided monarchy who appear in 1-2 Kings: Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, Nehushta, and Hamutal. Parallel texts are essential, such as with Nehushta (Jer 13, 22, 29) and Hamutal (Ezek 19), as they help to establish the *mythos* surrounding the position of queen mother.¹

Within the investigation of the functions of the queen mothers, I will establish how their actions presented in the text are akin to the same deeds of the kings who

¹ The primary interest here is the narrative's presentation of the function of the queen mother. Her historical function is not so easily ignored, however, as her actions, historical or perceived, are the driving force behind the narrator's retelling of events to present the narrator's agenda.

received qualified approval and negative evaluations. In order to characterize the actions of these women, Linda Shearing offers six elements that demonstrate what a “wicked queen/queen mother” is. After analyzing the stories of Jezebel and Athaliah, she lists the following characteristics: “(1) non-Judean; (2) politically powerful; (3) aggressive; (4) connected with Asherah and/or Baal; (5) liabilities to their husbands and sons; and (6) responsible for the death of others.”² These elements in combination with one another endanger the sanctity of the Mosaic law. A politically powerful or aggressive woman would not necessarily damage the monarchy. As I will demonstrate in chapter five, Bathsheba is aggressive and politically powerful but she is depicted as a “good” queen mother. The power and aggression allow for the manifestation of non-Judean elements, such as Asherah and/or Baal worship, and influence that becomes a liability for the king and the nation.

As laid out in chapter three, the vast majority of the rulers forsook the covenant and Mosaic law, primarily through worship of foreign gods and goddesses but also through other actions as described in 2 Kgs 17, 21, and 24 (which include the death of innocent people). I will, therefore, focus upon the negative aspects of political power and aggression of the queen mother’s tenure, as well as her involvement with foreign worship and shedding of innocent blood. As prophesied in Deut 28, the result of covenant infidelity is removal from the land, which lies with the entire monarchy, king and queen mother, according to the narrator.³

² Linda Shearing, “Queen,” *ABD* 5:586.

³ Throughout chapter four, I use content from my master’s thesis regarding Maacah, Athaliah, and Nehushta (“Death, Demotion, and Exile: The Roles of Maacah, Athaliah, and Nehushta Reexamined” [Th.M. thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, 2006], 20-54).

Regnal Formulas and the Queen Mother

The clearest evidence for the importance of the queen mother lies in the regnal formulas. As previously discussed, the text names the mother of the king for each Judean king in their respective regnal formulas with the exception of Jehoram and Ahaz, thereby listing fifteen different women for seventeen kings.⁴ The text does not name the queen mothers for the northern kingdom.⁵ As demonstrated in chapter three, the formulas serve as a lens by which the editor communicates a theological perception of the divided monarchy: the kingship as a whole has failed God and failed the people in its responsibility of keeping the Mosaic law. The exile, therefore, is just punishment for the nation's disloyalty. The following section will investigate what the formulas themselves may offer, if anything, in regard to the place of the queen mother in the narrator's theological platform of 1 and 2 Kings.

Previous Hypotheses

As demonstrated in the history of research in the first chapter, scholars have posited three main theories for the naming of the queen mothers in the Judean regnal formulas: importance in dynastic succession and determining the king's legitimacy (Anderson, Ben-Barak, Bronner, de Vaux), presence of the queen mother in the editor's sources (Bin-Nun, Ishida, Solvang), and the queen mother's influence upon her son

⁴ See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the Judean queen mothers.

⁵ The text names Jeroboam's mother, Zeruah in 1 Kgs 11:26, but the listing is not within a regnal formula. Jeroboam has not yet become king when the narrator names her. Her naming may possibly be due to Jeroboam's status at the time of her listing. Since Jeroboam begins his rebellion against Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 11, he is a contender to the throne of Judah and the text identifies each male ruler of Judah by his mother, in addition to several other markers.

(Bowen, Solvang).⁶ The first theory argues that the appearance of the queen mothers in the regnal formulas demonstrate dynastic stability and continuity. The text does not name the queen mothers for the northern kingdom then due to dynastic instability.⁷ The editor, however, easily establishes dynastic stability for Judah simply by listing that the current king is a son of the former king through an unbroken line. The presence of the queen mother is not necessary to show how the kingship passed from father to son throughout the generations of Judah's existence.

An extension of this theory includes the legitimacy of the continuing Davidic dynasty and the legitimacy of the individual kings by virtue of his mother.⁸ A king's legitimacy, however, depended upon his patrilineage, not his matrilineage. The kings' mothers were not the daughters of Davidic families. These women married a Davidic heir rather than being Davidic themselves. The son of the deceased king ascending to the throne without note of usurpation is sufficient proof that he is a legitimate heir and

⁶ I will not address Nadav Na'aman's theory that the text preserves the queen mother's name in order to honor her during the annual rites of the ancestor cult as adopted from the Hittites ("Queen Mothers and Ancestors Cult in Judah in the First Temple Period," in *Berührungspunkte: Studien Zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und Seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu einem 65. Geburtstag* [ed. Ingo Kottsieper, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Jakob Wöhrle; AOAT 350; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008], 479-490). No other scholar agrees with Na'aman and the theory is vastly speculative. There is little to no foundation as to the presence of annual cultic ceremonies honoring ancestors and the theory ignores the purposes of the king list as presented in the regnal formulas. See chapter one for more regarding Na'aman's article.

⁷ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *CBQ* 45 (Apr 1983): 180; Zafrira Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," *JBL* 110 (Spr 1991): 24; and Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 118.

⁸ Nancy R. Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," *CBQ* 63, 4 (Oct 2001): 603; and Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University of America, 2004), 49. Bowen demonstrates that when the people of the land intervene in a son's ascension to the throne, the people choose a king whose mother is Judean. The queen mother, therefore, legitimates the choice the people of the land made. This type of intervention occurs only three times, however, and, yet, twelve other queen mothers (and usually her place of origin) receive a note in the text. If this information were important for the people's intervention, then the same information would not be important for the remaining queen mothers.

legitimate king. The text does not delineate the son's birth order and his mother's status prior to or at the time of his ascension. The formulas overtly connect the succession of the newly crowned king to his father or his brother, in which case, the brother is reconnected to the father. As evidenced in the numerous genealogies in the Hebrew Bible, the mother receives little mention as she does not prove lineage; one's father proves lineage. The king's mother, therefore, is not necessary to prove that each individual king was both a legitimate son and a legitimate Davidic king.⁹

The second theory hypothesized is that the editor lists the queen mother for the Judean kings simply because the available sources do so as well.¹⁰ This theory is plausible as there is an obvious reason, at least to the redactor, for the exclusion of the northern queen mother but not the southern queen mother. Quite possibly, the sources simply did not include the northern queen mother. Yet, the narrator tells the reader that the text does not include all the information regarding the king and his reign, which can be found in the editor's sources (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:19; 14: 29; 2 Kgs 1:18). The editor made a conscious choice to *exclude* material from his sources; by extension, the editor made a conscious choice to *include* certain items. The Judean queen mother's name may have been in the editor's sources while the northern queen mother's name was not. The editor, however, still *chose* to include her for a purpose.

⁹ Elna Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup 349; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 83.

¹⁰ Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 157; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 79.

The final hypothesis argues for the queen mother's inclusion due to her influence at court.¹¹ Scholars are often vague on this topic and have not determined what exactly her role was in the monarchy, usually stating that her role was influential or powerful rather than what the role was. Nancy R. Bowen argues that it is possibly the queen mother's place of origin that contributes to the king's evaluation. All kings prior to Manasseh (whose actions no following king and queen mother can rectify) who receive a negative evaluation have a foreign mother. Bowen asks: "What if, then, the concern for the mother of the Judean (only) king is in part a reflex of the Deuteronomistic critique of Solomon and foreign wives?"¹² In response, why not connect the king who was married to the foreign woman to that woman's origins rather than the son? If indeed it is the queen mother's place of origin that is problematic for the editor, then the narrator assumes that she held some sway over her son and that she influenced him according to her foreign place of birth. This theory offers much difficulty as there are only three examples (Joash, Amaziah, Azariah) prior to Josiah with four other kings receiving complete or qualified approval without the mention of the queen mother's heritage (Asa, Jehhoshaphat, Jotham, Hezekiah) or the king receives qualified approval with a queen mother who is directly in violation of the covenant (Asa).

Influential by Virtue of Inclusion

The regnal formulas offer readers nothing more concrete about the queen mother than her name and her place of origin. What one can infer from them is the queen

¹¹ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 48; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 84.

¹² Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 602

mother's place of importance and high status in the monarchy.¹³ No other pattern of regnal reports in the ancient Near East lists the name of the queen mother consistently such as with Judah.¹⁴ The editor made a deliberate decision to include her in her son's regnal report, which is a purposeful statement upon the king's reign. What is in his report directly reflects the evaluation the editor has assigned him. The reader is to view the incidents of the king's reign in light of the information provided in the regnal formulas.¹⁵ The reports are shaped to the narrator's theological platform of how the kings and the people were unfaithful to Yahweh, which in turn justifies the prophecy of Deut 28 and the eventual demise of the nation.

The queen mother's inclusion must reflect the king's evaluation on some level. Her influence upon the monarchy is not constrained to her husband's rule but demonstrates that she was active during her son's reign;¹⁶ her connection is not as a wife but as a mother. This purpose is not clear through the formulas alone as the theories above have demonstrated. The third theory has the most merit as the queen mother has a

¹³ Claudia V. Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 104; Henri Cazelles, "La Mere du Roi-Messie dans l'Ancien Testament," *Maria et Ecclesia* 5 (1959): 50; Herbert Donner, "Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament," in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August 1958 gewidmet* (ed. Richard von Kienle et al; Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), 106; Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 362; Georg Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," *TZ* 10 (1954), 161; E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 21 n 5; and John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 93-94. Ktziah Spanier writes: "The succession formulae of the kings provide a manifestation of (the queen mother's) status" ("The Queen Mother in the Judaeon Royal Court: Maacah—A Case Study," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* [FCB; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 186).

¹⁴ Na'aman, "Queen Mothers and Ancestors Cult," 482; and Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 79. Where women appear, such as with the Sumerian King List, they are rulers of cities.

¹⁵ Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash* (JSOTSup 209; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davis; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 136.

¹⁶ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 84.

place reserved for the editor's purpose, although indistinct through the formulas alone. There is a hidden connection between the mother of the king and his reign that is so influential that his regnal report needs to include her to justify the text's theological purpose.¹⁷ The rationale for inclusion must broaden to the instances where the queen mothers appear in 1 and 2 Kings as well the queen mothers who appear outside of these two books (which I will address in chapter five).

Maacah: Woman of Royal Power and Cultic Patroness

The first queen mother to appear in 1 and 2 Kings after the division of the monarchy is Maacah. The regnal formulas introduce Maacah's name in 1 Kgs 15:2 and list her as the mother of Abijam and the daughter of Abishalom (a variant spelling of Absalom). Abijam is the son of Rehoboam (1 Kgs 14:31), the first king of Judah, which implies Maacah is a wife of Rehoboam. 2 Chronicles 11:20-22 confirms this familial relationship and even states that he loved her more than all his other seventeen wives and sixty concubines. Indeed, Rehoboam chooses Abijah (a variant name for Abijam), Maacah's son, as chief prince among his brothers.¹⁸ The text then lists her again as the

¹⁷ If a theological agenda is at the center of the queen mother's inclusion, one may ask why the editor does not include the queen mother of the northern kingdom as she could have easily functioned in the same manner, especially as the notorious Jezebel serves as a northern queen mother for a short time. The speculation here is endless: the editor's sources may not have included her name; the position may not have been official; or the queen mother may have not held any influence in the northern court. As the narrator is justifying the downfall of each nation, the northern queen mother may have no bearing upon the northern kingdom's end. As discussed in chapter three, the text consistently compares each northern king to Jeroboam as if Jeroboam had long sealed the northern kingdom's fate. If each northern king continues to walk in the ways of Jeroboam, the queen mother plays a non-existent role in the north's break from Judah and the nation's patronizing of shrines outside of Jerusalem. The Judean queen mother exhibited a more pronounced influence in her position at court according to the narrator. With the nation's fate fluid with each king until Manasseh, she had the ability to influence the monarchy, the outcome of the king's reign, and, by extension, possibly the fate of the nation unlike the northern kingdom where Jeroboam instituted the demise of the northern kingdom at its inception.

¹⁸ Second Chronicles 13:2 contradicts 2 Chr 11:22 in referring to the mother of Abijah (Abijam) as Micaiah, daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. One cannot determine which text is the more reliable one and,

mother of Asa and the daughter of Abishalom in 1 Kgs 15:10. It is during the reign of Asa that Maacah, the queen mother, makes her appearance.

Asa did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh just as David had done. For this reason, Asa removed male temple prostitutes from the land as well as the idols that his ancestors had made. He then also removed his (grand)mother Maacah from being queen mother, *meg-gěbirā*, because she had made an abominable thing for Asherah or an abominable thing like an asherah (1 Kgs 15:13). Asa cut down this abominable thing and burned it at the Wadi Kidron even though he did not take away the high places. Even though these high places remained, Asa's heart was at peace or in covenant with Yahweh all his days, gaining him approval, even if only qualified (1 Kgs 15:14).

therefore, the one that is accurate (Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* [Lund: Gleerup, 1963], 63), and the reader must attribute an error to the redactor or scribe (Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 53; Pierre Buis, *Le Livre des Rois* [SB; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1997], 131; Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings* [AOTC; ed. Patrick D. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 2006], 151-2; and Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 162-163).

The text possibly may need emendation so that Asa is not Abijam's son but his brother (Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* [AB 10; ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 397; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* [ed. Henry Synder Gehman; ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951], 274; and Ernst Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige: Kapitel 1-16* [ATD 11, 1; ed. Otto Kaiser and Lothar Perlit; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985], 187). Patricia J. Berlyn does not find this emendation persuasive as the text does not list Asa as one of Maacah's children in 2 Chr 11:20 ("The Great Ladies," *JBQ* 24, 1 [Jan-Mar 1996]: 29).

Carol Smith argues that if one reads "granddaughter" instead of "daughter," then Uriel would be the husband of Tamar, Absalom's daughter ("Maacah," *ABD* 4:429; see also Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* [TOTC; ed. Donald J. Wiseman; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993], 154).

D. Rudolf Kittel suggests that Absalom is not David's son but another previously unknown Absalom and the names of the people involved, such as Absalom and Uriel have been lost to the editor (*Die Bücher der Könige* [HKAT; ed. D. W. Nowack; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900], 123-4).

Marvin A. Sweeney posits the probability of Maacah the *gěbirā* whom the text lists as Abijam's and Asa's mother and the daughter of Abishalom is actually another Maacah who was married to Rehoboam. Abijam's biological mother is Micaiah, daughter of Uriel. Asa, therefore, is willing to depose her since she is not his biological mother or grandmother (*I & II Kings: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007], 191, 193). All of these concerns, however, do not detract from what *position* Maacah may or may not have held or the *roles* she played in Abijam's and Asa's rules.

Who is Maacah, the Mother of Asa?

Because 1 Kgs 15:10 still names her as the daughter of Abishalom, this second Maacah would be the same woman. The parallel account in 2 Chr 15:16-17 only lists her as Asa's mother, with no descriptor. This presents an interesting enigma as 1 Kgs 15:8 lists Asa as the son of Abijam (1 Kgs 15:8). For Maacah to be both Abijam's and Asa's mother, they would have to be brothers by different fathers or, taking the text literally, Maacah would have to have engaged in an incestuous relationship with her son Abijam, neither of which is likely.¹⁹ Walter Brueggemann argues that the text intends the same woman based on the use of her name for both Abijam's and Asa's mother.²⁰

The more logical conclusion would be that Maacah was Asa's grandmother. One can translate the term for "mother" as a female ancestor just as one can translate "daughter" as a female descendant.²¹ This would be especially true as the text refers to David as Asa's father in 1 Kgs 11:9, which readers know is incorrect as he would be David's great-great-grandson based on the male lineage presented in the text.²² The verse simply indicates that David was his ancestor.

¹⁹ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 63.

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; ed. R. Scott Nash; Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2000), 189.

²¹ Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *2 Kings* (AB 11; ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 98. Maacah's relationship with Abijam and Asa is impossible to determine based on the texts and their inconsistencies. Volkmar Fritz suggests that "mother of X" is less a familial relationship and more of a title for an office, allowing for Maacah to be both Asa's "mother" and biological grandmother (*1 & 2 Kings* [trans. Anselm Hagedorn; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 166; see also Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings* [Berit Olam; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996], 211; and Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige*, 187). Richard D. Nelson muses that Maacah and Abijam possibly committed incest and this sexual transgression offended Deuteronomistic sensibilities (*First and Second Kings* [IBC; ed. James Luther Mays; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987], 98). This study will refer to Maacah as Asa's grandmother for the sake of simplicity.

²² One can assume the same type of relationship between Maacah and Absalom. Absalom could be her biological father or only a male descendant. Maacah, however, appears to be of the same generation

Maacah's Roles as Queen Mother

The narrator does not allow Maacah to have a voice in this passage and does not present any of her words or thoughts surrounding this incident in which the text names her. What the reader can conclude by way of her roles as queen mother is her position of power and her involvement in cult activities. She does not relinquish her role as the mother of the king for the next ruler's mother and 1 Kgs 15:13 specifically calls her *gēbîrâ*, a position that must warrant her removal from it due to the position's influence. She also asserts her influence in the religious activities of Judah as a patron of the cult of Asherah.

A woman in an influential position. The first instance of Maacah's influence is the way she was able to continue as queen mother for Asa even after serving Abijam previously in the same capacity. For reasons unknown that the passage does not offer, she does not yield her official position. According to Susan Ackerman, her retention of the office implies that she commanded a position of power in the royal court as she managed to supplant Asa's biological mother.²³ When the text does not list a queen mother for a king, the death of that mother is one of the assumptions to explain the redactor's purpose of leaving out the material. Asa's mother simply could have died at a young age before Asa assumed the throne.²⁴

as her husband Rehoboam is the son of Solomon, Absalom's brother. From this, the reader can easily consider her as Absalom's daughter.

²³ Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 143. Spanier writes: "She accomplished this by redefining her familial relationships, perhaps adopting her grandson, Asa, as her son" ("The Queen Mother in the Judean Royal Court: Maacah," 195).

²⁴ While the death of Asa's mother may explain why Maacah continued as queen mother, no other grandmother assumes the position of queen mother for those kings (Jehoram and Ahaz) lacking a queen

From the appellation of *gēbîrâ*, the assumption follows that the term vests Maacah with great power.²⁵ First Kings 15:13 states that Asa removed Maacah “from being queen mother (*meg-gēbîrâ*).” A person has to be in some type of position to be removed from it and that position must have great influence to need to remove the person from it. The text seems then to use the title *gēbîrâ* or the appellation “mother of the king” to describe her position in the court rather than her actual maternal status in relation to Asa as his mother.²⁶

The climax of Asa’s reform is the removal of the queen mother and the destruction of her cult object. Asa “assert(s) his authority and consolidate(s) his own rule under the banner of the Yahwistic cult. He was thus able to sever his connection with the foreign cult sponsored by the queen mother.”²⁷ Maacah’s cultic activities specifically are grounds for her dismissal from office. Once Asa removes Maacah from office, the implication is that she no longer has any influence on the Yahwistic cult activities under

mother appellation in the regnal formulas. The death of their grandmothers could also explain why a grandmother did not act as their queen mothers, still giving basis to Maacah’s assumption of a vacant position.

Also, Maacah acting as a regent or continuing in the position of queen mother for Asa also may explain her official continuation into her grandson’s reign. Maacah’s relationship to Asa leads to the possibility of her acting as “queen-regent” until Asa comes of age (Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 61). E. W. Faulstich suggests that it is not impossible that the counting of his reign did not begin until he reached maturity and, as such, Maacah actually rules in his stead for the first two years of his reign (*History, Harmony and the Hebrew Kings* [Spencer: Chronology Books, 1986], 61). Ackerman suggests that Asa’s forty-one year reign implies that he succeeded to the throne at a very early age and, therefore, Maacah, as queen mother, serves as regent until he reaches an age in which he could assume the kingship (*Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 143). In regards to the text not listing Maacah as a reigning monarch aside from the fact that the Hebrew Bible never considered women as “queens,” Faulstich posits: “As an unofficial regent, a non-Davidite, and a worshipper of Asherah, it is likely that the chronicler would be loathe to list her among the monarchs of Judah. All this is conjecture, inconsistent with the established rules of chronology” (*History, Harmony and the Hebrew Kings*, 61).

²⁵ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*,” 25. See also, Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 131.

²⁶ Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah,” 193.

²⁷ Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah,” 194.

Asa's reign. Maacah holds enough power in connection to her office of *gēbîrâ* for there to be a need to remove her from it to end her influence at court.

Patron of the Asherah cult. Part of Maacah's influence at court may have been in the political arena, but she unquestionably asserted herself in the religious activities of Judah as patron of the cult of Asherah through her commission of an abominable image for Asherah;²⁸ she would have more than likely erected the item in a temple for Asherah or in the temple of Yahweh to represent Asherah.²⁹

²⁸ The text does not introduce the Canaanite goddess into the kingdom of Judah by name until this time even though practices are described that are attributed to her cultic worship prior to this passage. Some scholars argue that Maacah introduced the Asherah cult to Jerusalem (for example, see Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 59, 61; Phyllis Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* [OBT; ed. Walter Brueggemann et al; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 92; Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 131; and Spanier, "The Queen Mother in the Judaeon Royal Court: Maacah," 194). Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel assert that Maacah so much as used the outbreak of war between the presiding kings as an opening to reintroduce the worship of Asherah to the public (*EBC* 4:129).

Liturgical activities associated with Asherah worship appear earlier in the text as the Scriptures detail Canaanite religious practices prior to Maacah even marrying Rehoboam. According to the narrator's point of view, the Israelites would be familiar with Canaanite worship as Yahweh often prohibits them from performing the rituals or commanded them to destroy the Canaanite altars. Exodus 34:13 and Deut 7:5, 12:3 are instructions to destroy the altars of the inhabitants/nations of the land and to cut down their sacred poles. Deuteronomy 16:21 warns against building a sacred pole beside the altar of Yahweh and Deut 23:17-18 condemns ritualized prostitution, evident in Asa's removal of the male temple prostitutes. Acting upon command, Gideon tears down his father's altar to Baal and cuts down the asherah pole that is beside it (Jud 6:25-30). Maacah's historical practice of Asherah worship is best left to an archaeological study of the era and the determination of the dating of the texts involved as the prescripts of Deuteronomy, for example, are probably much later than the records of the books of Kings. Narratively, however, Maacah could have reintroduced the public worship of Asherah but she herself did not introduce the cult despite her implied foreign connections, discussed below. See also footnote 32 for a brief discussion of an established Asherah cult before and during the reigns of Maacah's sons.

²⁹ Contra Martin Noth (*Könige* [BKAT 9; ed. Martin Noth and Hans Walter Wolff; Neukirchener Verlag: Des Erziehungsvereins Newukirchen-Vluyn, 1968], 337), Susan Ackerman argues that the image stood in Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem because the royal palace and the temple were side by side in proximity and the temple was "in essence a private chapel for the monarchy and thus (was) the obvious place for a member of the royal family to erect a religious icon" ("The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* [ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], 195). Also, Ackerman notes the asherah that Manasseh erected in Yahweh's temple (2 Kgs 21:7) and the various cultic trappings used in worship of Yahweh that Josiah removed from Yahweh's temple (2 Kgs 23:4, 7) (*Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 195; "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112 [Fall 1993]: 391). Second Kings 18:4, 21:7, and 23:4-7 also help to support the theory that an image or statue was erected possibly inside the temple of Yahweh to represent the cult of Asherah.

By removing Maacah and burning her cultic object, Asa intentionally “negated the heterodox practices of his mother . . . (he) is a reforming king, taking steps to assure a singular focus on Yahweh.”³⁰ By virtue of her name and her ancestral relations, the narrator may have perceived her as having foreign ties or being foreign herself and, therefore, culpable of foreign worship by origin alone. Gösta W. Ahlström uses the Philistine name “Achish ben Maacah” and Maacah the son of Abraham’s brother Nahor, founder and personification of Aram-Naharaim (Gen 22:24), to claim that the queen mother Maacah is of non-Israelite descent and her foreignness may be the reason for her promulgation of the Asherah cult.³¹ Assuming Maacah is the granddaughter of Maacah, the mother of Absalom, the text links the queen mother to her grandmother’s foreign heritage. Maacah, David’s wife, is the only one of his wives given a foreign royal appellation (daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; see 2 Sam 3:3; 1 Chr 3:2). Ktziah Spanier posits that the woman’s name “recalls an ancestral, probably matriarchal, connection with the district of Maacah . . . located to the north and west of the Geshurite kingdom.”³² These foreign connections and marriage of Maacah, the wife of David and the mother of Absalom, solidifies the foreign heritage of Maacah, the queen mother. The text, however, gives no indication that she is responsible for the presence of the cult, only that she was responsible for the abominable object dedicated to Asherah.³³

³⁰ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 189.

³¹ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 59. See also Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel,” 390

³² Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeon Royal Court: Maacah,” 189.

³³ Ackerman, Ahlström, and Mordechai Cogan argue that the cult was already established among the populace or as part of the royal cult alongside the worship of Yahweh. Ackerman writes that biblical and archeological evidence suggests that Asa’s desire for Yahwistic worship only was not normative in Judah and the worship of Asherah was customary among the general population (“The Queen Mother and

The narrator directly links her to Asherah's name and specifically to the patronage of the goddess. Maacah *herself* made an image for Asherah and Asa therefore removes her from her position of *gēbîrâ*. The passage lists no other noteworthy deeds of Maacah and, from this lack of information, the reader can infer the magnitude of her religious involvement. When she makes an appearance in the text, it is because she has asserted herself in the matter of the temple cult, specifically in regards to the worship of Asherah.

Conclusion

Of Shearing's six elements that constitute a wicked queen mother, Maacah fulfills five of them. In regards to a wicked queen mother being non-Judean, if Maacah herself is not foreign, she has foreign ties by virtue of the foreign connections to her name and her grandmother, Maacah, a princess of Geshur (first element). Her political power, aggressiveness, and connections with Asherah (second, third, and fourth elements) combine in the one narrated report of her tenure as queen mother, which consists solely of her removal from being *gēbîrâ* for her involvement in the construction and display of an objectionable image for Asherah. The removal of Maacah from being *gēbîrâ* eliminated the power that she possessed to ensure that the worship of Asherah flourished, which is a liability to her son (fifth element). Ahlström writes that it is "natural that Maacah was able to propagate various cult forms, since her position made this

the Cult in Ancient Israel," 390; *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 145). See also Saul M. Olyan's argument that the cult worship may have been part of the state cult and Judahite religion worshipped Asherah officially along with Yahweh (*Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* [SBLMS 34; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars, 1988], 9). According to Ahlström, Asa cutting down the abominable thing that Maacah set up and burning it in the valley in order to carry out his purge of the Canaanite fertility cult "implies that 'āshērāh-worship formed part of the royal cultus of Israel" (*Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 57). Cogan takes the supposition that Asherah worship was part of the state religion one step further in the following: "Her patronage of the Asherah cult is taken as one aspect of her responsibility in representing the goddess at court, which included legitimizing her son's rule in the name of YHWH's consort" (*1 Kings*, 398). See also Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 385-401; and "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," 179-209.

possible.”³⁴ She is so politically and religiously powerful Asa must dispose of her permanently.³⁵ One may conclude that Maacah, separate from her cultic activities, was a queen mother vested with great power and was equally as influential in the royal court. Maacah, unfortunately, uses this power and influence in a manner contradictory to the Mosaic law. If she were a ruling king, the narrator undoubtedly would have pronounced a negative judgment upon her.

Jezebel: No Peace for the Apostate Queen Mother

Jezebel’s story in the Hebrew Bible begins in 1 Kgs 16:31 and ends in 2 Kgs 9:37, the final word on her death. The text introduces her as the wife of the northern king Ahab in 2 Kgs 16:31. As the wife of Ahab, she participates most notably in the persecution of Elijah (2 Kgs 18-19) and the murder of Naboth (2 Kgs 21). As queen mother, however, she disappears from the narrative until her death with only six references to her. The formulas of Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:51) and Jehoram (2 Kgs 3:1), Jezebel’s sons, evaluate the two kings in light of Ahab’s and Jezebel’s ways. The third mention of Jezebel involves Elisha’s attempt to send Jehoram back to his father’s and mother’s prophets (2 Kgs 3:13). The fourth reference is the unnamed prophet’s words at Jehu’s anointing (2 Kgs 9:6-10), commanding Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab in order to avenge Jezebel’s murder of Yahweh’s prophets. The prophet adds a particular word against Jezebel, prophesying that dogs will eat her in Jezreel and none will bury

³⁴ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 61.

³⁵ If Judah sanctioned the cultic worship prior to Asa’s kingship, Maacah simply acts in a manner proper to the *gēbîrâ* or status as the queen mother. She then becomes a victim in carrying out her assigned role when Asa removes her from her station. This theory is historical rather than narrative or theological and so does not involve the concerns of this dissertation. The narrator is not concerned with Maacah’s popular cultic tasks but views her through a Deuteronomistic lens, which does not allow for the Asherah cult in any form, whether the nation sanctions it prior to Asa’s reign or not.

her. The fifth reference comes from Jehu, declaring no peace can exist with Jezebel's influence abounding (2 Kgs 9:22).

The last reference to Jezebel as a queen mother is the most extensive as the passage describes her encounter with Jehu and death at his hands (2 Kgs 9:30-37). Jezebel receives word of Jehu's arrival in Jezreel and prepares herself with make-up and by adorning her hair. Looking out her window, she calls to him upon sight, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your lord?" Without a word to her, Jehu asks who is on his side, to which Jezebel's eunuchs nonverbally respond. Jehu commands them to throw Jezebel down from the window. After her fall, horses trample her. Leaving her body there, Jehu goes into the palace to dine but then issues a command for her burial as she was a king's daughter. The disposal crew finds very little of her remaining. A final note confirms that her death fulfills Elijah's prophecy, that she will be dog food and dog waste so that none will be able to identify who she is.

Who is Jezebel, the mother of Ahaziah and Jehoram?

Even through the text's identification of Jezebel and her familial relations, the narrator passes judgment upon her. First Kings 16:31 identifies Jezebel as the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Ethbaal was king of all Phoenicia, including Tyre and Sidon, symbols of wickedness in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Joel 3:4; Isa 23; Ezek 16; Amos 1:9-10; Zech 9:2-4) and well-known for Baal and Astarte worship.³⁶ The redactor judges Ahab negatively not only for following in the sins of Jeroboam but also because he

³⁶ Janet Howe Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1999), 9.

committed greater sins by marrying Jezebel and subsequently worshipping Baal.³⁷ The text indirectly blames Ahab's worship of Baal on Jezebel, after mentioning the marriage, by immediately describing his wayward turn to Baalism, building an altar and temple to Baal, and erecting an asherah pole.

The text identifies only two sons by Jezebel, both of whom become king. Ahaziah's regnal formula describes him as walking in the ways of Jeroboam and the ways of "his father and mother" (1 Kgs 22:51-53): "As were the father and mother, so is the son."³⁸ While the text does not name Jezebel here, neither does it identify Ahab, although the reader knows from the previous verse that Ahaziah is Ahab's son. Jezebel must be his mother as the text identifies no other wives, especially not one so evil as to receive such condemnation. With Ahab now dead, a comparison to the former king is not uncharacteristic of the narrative. What is unique here is the comparison to the evil of the current king's mother, one still alive. Patricia Dutcher-Walls writes of the new queen mother: "She has earned the dubious distinction of being the new standard by which evil is judged even while she is alive. She holds power over the story through the continued invocation of her evil as the paradigm for the evil of her son."³⁹

In Jehoram's regnal formula (2 Kgs 3:1-3), his evil, which includes walking in the ways of Jeroboam, is qualified as not being like "his father and mother" since he removes a pillar of Baal that Ahab had erected. Again, the same argument applies here for his

³⁷ Most scholars agree Jezebel's and Ahab's marriage appears to be a political alliance for military protection against enemies and access to trade routes and multiple types of goods each region could offer (for example, see Janet Howe Gaines, "How Bad Was Jezebel?" *BRev* 16, 5 [2000]: 15; and Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen* [Interfaces; ed. Barbara Green; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2004], 24-5).

³⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 61.

³⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 61.

mother being Jezebel. While Jehoram, whom the text also calls Joram, did not commit the same evil as his parents, Elisha confirms the continued existence of both his father's and mother's prophets (2 Kgs 3:13). Dutcher-Walls writes:

The queen and her prophets are still a force to be reckoned with, one that continues to shape the reign of her son Jehoram. Despite the mention that Jehoram had removed the pillar of Baal, all influence of non-Yahwistic prophecy has not been removed. And Jehoram is branded with his mother's and father's wickedness.⁴⁰

The wickedness of Jezebel as the wife of a king is obvious to the reader but now the text begins to make clear that Jezebel as a two-time queen mother is wicked.⁴¹

Jezebel's Roles as Queen Mother

While she is not in every scene from 1 Kgs 16 to 2 Kgs 9 or even the majority of them as the accounts alternate between the northern and southern kingdoms or focus upon Elijah and Elisha, she is in the background of Israel nonetheless as wife of the king and then queen mother when she is not acting directly. Her direct actions as queen mother only occur in her death scene in 2 Kgs 9. I will focus on Jezebel as a queen mother but it is difficult to separate her roles as queen mother from the roles she adopted as wife of the king. As the wife of Ahab, the narrator characterizes her very negatively, which carries over into her tenure as queen mother, and colors her portrait as the mother of Ahaziah and Jehoram. In addition to her characterization as a queen mother, this

⁴⁰ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 65.

⁴¹ A few scholars speculate that Jezebel may also be the queen of Ps 45. Such descriptions as the "daughter of Tyre" and ivory palaces hint at the possible celebration of Jezebel's and Ahab's marriage. Here, Jezebel is cast in a very favorable light as the queen is described as glorious (v 14). See Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 53; Stanley B. Frost, "Judgment on Jezebel, or a Woman Wronged," *ThTo* 20, 4 (Jan 1964): 516; Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 25; and William E. Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women* (Contributions in Women's Studies 128; Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 70. Gaines suggests that the psalm was written before the Deuteronomistic Historian recast Jezebel's story or before Jezebel's evil spread through the kingdom (*Music in the Old Bones*, 25).

section also will investigate briefly her major roles as Ahab's wife that probably influenced the narrator's point of view on the queen mother. Jezebel was an ardent patron of the Baal cult. She wielded considerable political influence at the court, so much so one could characterize her as a co-ruler. Jehu must kill her in order to begin his reign due to her power and status. Last, the text posthumously recognizes her specifically as a *gěbîrâ*, denoting her status and importance at the court, even in death.

The (true?) power behind the throne. Jezebel actively involved herself in politics during her husband's and son's reigns, to the point of possibly being a co-ruler with them. Separate from Ahab and her sons, she had much political clout and the power to back it up. For instance, while Jezebel was married to Ahab, she was in charge of a body of men who killed the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs 18:4, 13) as it was unlikely that she herself killed each individual prophet. Ahab or her position as the king's wife gave her the authority and means to carry out these murders without backlash from anyone but Elijah and the Yahwistic prophets. She appears to have her own court and the financial means to sustain it from the text's description of the 850 Baal and Asherah prophets who eat at her table (1 Kgs 18:19).

In the Elijah cycle, it appears that the conflict is not between the king Ahab and Elijah but Jezebel and Elijah.⁴² It is Jezebel's prophets who stand against Elijah on Mount Carmel. It is Jezebel who threatens Elijah with death for his actions against her prophets after the Mount Carmel episode (1 Kgs 19:1-2). Elijah flees apparently because she has the ability to carry out her threat. Dutcher-Walls argues that, after Mount

⁴² Athalya Brenner, "Jezebel 1," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament* (ed. Carol Meyers; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 101.

Carmel, the narrative shows a weak, defeated Ahab who submits to Yahweh's power, but Jezebel is not daunted and emerges as an effective, powerful, and "dominant presence behind and over the story."⁴³

Jezebel's involvement in the taking of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21) also demonstrates a woman who serves as co-ruler with her husband. In regards to her actions, Wénin writes: "elle satisfera l'envie de son mari, ne serait-ce que pour le plaisir de lui donner une leçon de royauté, comme elle le lui dit d'emblée."⁴⁴ To do so, Jezebel gives orders in the king's name and uses the king's royal seal. The nobles she employs in her murder plot obey *her* and send word back to *her*, not the king. Athalya Brenner argues that this episode is evidence that she regularly served as the king's representative in the administration of the kingdom, especially as the passage does not claim that she took the king's seal for this one plot.⁴⁵ While this incident occurs during Jezebel's marriage to Ahab, it carries the consequence of a lifetime for the queen mother. Elijah announces God's judgment against the house of Ahab, including Jezebel, for the murder of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:17-26). Jezebel was the key player in Naboth's murder as Ahab was

⁴³ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 35-36.

⁴⁴ André Wénin, "Personnages Humains et Anthropologie dan le Récit Biblique," in *Analyse Narrative et Bible* (Leuven: Leuven University, 2005), 50-51.

⁴⁵ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 27. Brenner also claims that it is likely Jezebel had her own seal in the king's name and that is the one she uses to seal the letter regarding her plot. The seal is a "symbol of the permanent institutional responsibility Ahab delegated to her." Gaines notes that it is unlikely she had access to the king's seal without his permission or knowledge. The text, unfortunately, is silent on how she obtains it (*Music in the Old Bones*, 61). Also, Gaines argues that Jezebel's success in the murder plot suggests that Jezebel was a co-regent with Ahab or at least a co-ruler on some issues (*Music in the Old Bones*, 68).

a passive participant.⁴⁶ The reason for the deathly prophecy, therefore, lies at Jezebel's feet.

Jezebel's political involvement becomes more indirect during her time as queen mother. The reference to Jezebel in Ahaziah's formula may serve as a way to damn the king or it may serve as a social profile, according to Dutcher-Walls, demonstrating in Ahaziah's case that Jezebel was instrumental in ensuring the succession of her son. Ahaziah may have remained loyal to his mother for help in his succession to the throne and, therefore, supported her cult. While Jehoram does not commit the same evil as Jezebel, Jezebel maintains her prophets under him (2 Kgs 3:13), demonstrating her continued power into his reign. Targeting Jezebel in the final prophecy against the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 9:6-10) instead of Jehoram, according to Brueggemann, shows that she was the driving force behind the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, and now Jehoram since she is so despised by the prophet.⁴⁷

According to Dutcher-Walls, Jezebel's recognition in the text during her husband's reign insinuates her as the power behind the throne. It is the ascension of her two sons who subsequently become king, however, that acknowledges her high social position and political power. Dutcher-Walls writes: "She alone among all those

⁴⁶ Marsha C. White suggests that the prophecy is against Ahab (1 Kgs 21:19) because he is unfit to rule because he cannot control his "dangerously foreign wife" ("Naboth's Vineyard and Jehu's Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination," *VT* 44, 1 (1994): 69 n 7).

⁴⁷ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 383. According to Marsha C. White, for Jezebel to be targeted for so much violence and not Jehoram or Ahab "suggests that she held a high rank at the time of the coup, higher than that of queen mother. The virulence of the attack on her character suggests that she was regent, that she was actually ruling in place of Joram when Jehu made his sweep" (*The Elijah Legends and Jehu's Coup* [BJS 311; Atlanta: Scholar's, 1997], 70). Brenner claims that Jezebel was a regent after Jehoram's death because she and her power base required Jehu to remove her before he could establish his own government (*The Israelite Woman*, 20).

contending to place their own candidate on the throne had the skill and force to determine the succession” after Ahab’s death.⁴⁸

The ultimate Baal patron. Jezebel is well-known as a worshipper of the Baal cult and one of the two most notorious incidents as Ahab’s wife is the contest between the Baal prophets and Elijah at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18). The prophets who take place in this match for divine dominance are 450 Baal prophets and 400 Asherah prophets who eat at Jezebel’s table, not Ahab’s or a shared table between the two (1 Kgs 18:19).⁴⁹ When Elijah and Yahweh defeat them, Elijah slaughters the prophets (1 Kgs 18:40) and Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah for their deaths (1 Kgs 19:2). Previously, she had been killing the prophets of Yahweh. She was probably a priestess of Baal in Sidon and maybe continued to serve as a priestess in Israel given her devotion and Ahab’s building of a temple to Baal after their marriage (1 Kgs 16:32).⁵⁰

With no incident to claim otherwise, this ardent devotion to Baal would not have changed simply due to Ahab’s death and her new position as queen mother. Elisha mocks Jehoram, telling him to go back to his father’s and mother’s prophets (2 Kgs 3:13), who are presumably pro-Baal or both pro-Baal and pro-Asherah as Jezebel did not keep prophets for any other deities. Also, Jehu’s words against her before his assassination of Jehoram appear to confirm her involvement in the propagation of the Baal cult during her tenure as queen mother (2 Kgs 9:22). Jehu mocks Jehoram’s peace

⁴⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 128.

⁴⁹ The Asherah prophets disappear from the narrative after this mention. For the probability of Jezebel worshipping Asherah, see Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel,” 392-5.

⁵⁰ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 24.

greeting, asking how there can be any peace while Jezebel's fornications and sorceries continue.

Either Jehu is literally calling Jezebel a whore and a witch⁵¹ despite no other evidence to testify to her sexual and magical escapades or he is using a metaphor to describe the proliferation of the anti-Yahwistic cult.⁵² Metaphorically, the Hebrew Bible describes covenant infidelity as the whoredom of the people, often described as an unfaithful wife of Yahweh (e.g., Ezek 16) and sexual promiscuity in general. From this perspective, Jezebel certainly led Ahab and the people of the northern kingdom astray through their propagation of the worship of Baal and Asherah. As for Jezebel's sorceries, Dutcher-Walls writes: "to pursue false gods and goddesses is to place one's trust in false powers and participate in 'sorcery'—rituals that manipulate and placate false divine beings."⁵³

Jehu's words about Jezebel's fornications and sorceries do more than confirm her continued support of the Baal cult. There is no *shalom*, no wholeness or wellbeing in in the north because of Jezebel alone. No other person, not Ahab's sons, not Jehoram, not Ahab's or Jehoram's followers, but Jezebel *alone* is responsible for "all the evil and

⁵¹ Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 78; see also Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," 110.

⁵² Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," 110; Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 75; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 170; Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; ed. E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 289; and Choon-Leong Seow, *NIB* 3:220.

⁵³ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 75; see also Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 213. Phipps suggests that Jehu uses these terms to describe Jezebel's support of Asherah and Baal due to the sexual nature of the deities and their worship (*Assertive Biblical Women*, 72).

wrong that characterizes the malignancy of Israel.”⁵⁴ She is the epitome of all that is evil and must be exterminated before exclusive Yahwistic worship can return.⁵⁵

A usurper’s regicide. Jezebel’s death reveals much about the power of her position and how the narrator views her. From her manner of dress, her audience before Jehu, and even the form of her death, the text describes a powerful ruler meeting her death in a manner consistent with her position as an influential queen mother. Usually when a new king succeeds his deceased father or a usurper is crowned, the queen mother—the newly installed king’s grandmother—disappears from the narrative, if she even appeared beyond her naming. Here, Jehu must dispose of the queen mother in order to begin his regime.

Jezebel prepares herself for the meeting with Jehu she knows is inevitable by putting on make-up and adorning her hair. Scholars, preachers, and writers have viewed Jezebel lining her eyes with antimony (stibium or kohl) as her intention of seducing Jehu due to two main reasons: (1) popular myth about the sexuality of make-up and (2) the Hebrew Bible describes the eyes and eye make-up for the purpose of seduction and uses them as symbols for feminine deception and trickery. Her seduction, the argument goes, is for self-preservation.⁵⁶ The rest of the scene contradicts this supposed seduction and, instead, describes an intelligent woman of position aware of her impending death.

⁵⁴ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 74-5.

⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 386; Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 74-5; and Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 291.

⁵⁶ Gaines, “How Bad Was Jezebel,” 22; and Simon B. Parker, “Jezebel’s Reception of Jehu,” *Maarav* 1, 1 (1978): 68, 73. Parker is a good example of authors who claim that Jezebel seeks to seduce Jehu in hopes that he will take her into his harem as it is common for usurpers to take the former king’s wives and concubines (“Jezebel’s Reception of Jehu,” 73). Jezebel, however, is not the king’s wife and not in the harem. She is a grandmother and a queen mother. Her husband’s reign ended fourteen years earlier

Janet Howe Gaines suggests that the application of kohl is a version of female war paint or armor. Jezebel does not flee but prepares for war by wearing the only armor available to women.⁵⁷ Gaines notes that Egyptian pharaohs and Spartan warriors used kohl either as part of their royal appearance in public or before battle. In addition, Gaines remarks that brushing one's hair is only a form of grooming with no evidence of seduction in ancient Mediterranean literature. Even Spartans would groom their hair before battle.⁵⁸ Jezebel grooms herself, therefore, as a way to meet Jehu as befitting her royal position.⁵⁹ Rather than wearing sackcloth and ashes, she appears composed and dignified with a little panache.⁶⁰ Gaines writes: "(S)he holds no illusions about her fate . . . (and) desires to go out boldly, like the regent she is."⁶¹

A member of royalty appearing at a window or on a balcony means the member is granting an audience, not for the purpose of seduction. Jezebel grants Jehu an audience from her balcony, like the Pharaohs,⁶² and "she demonstratively and symbolically takes

and two more kings have served since then. The queen mother and the wife of a king from three reigns past does not factor in a usurper's taking of the king's harem.

⁵⁷ Gaines, "How Bad Was Jezebel," 22; *Music in the Old Bones*, 78.

⁵⁸ Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 79, 81. Ahlström and Ben-Barak note that by Jezebel adorning her hair, she may have worn a crown to denote her royal status (Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 63; and Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 27).

⁵⁹ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 22; Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 387; Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion; ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 170; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 292; House, *1, 2 Kings*, 290; Montgomery, *Books of Kings*, 403; and Patterson and Austel, *EBC* 4:207, 209.

⁶⁰ Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 217; Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women*, 76; and Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1. Kön. 17-2. Kön. 25* (ATD 11, 2; ed. Otto Kaiser and Lothar Peritt; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 334.

⁶¹ Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 81-82

⁶² Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 82; and Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 334.

over the business of government following the king's death."⁶³ In her own eyes, she believes her position to be legitimate.⁶⁴ She strategically positions herself as royalty while taking advantage of the height to look down upon him metaphorically, which would seem to enable her to control the situation and challenge his supposed authority. A window from her chambers would appear safer than meeting Jehu in the street or in the throne room or a reception chamber.

From this supposedly safer position, she taunts Jehu by asking, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your lord?" Although some scholars have twisted these words to claim she is calling him a hero rather than Zimri,⁶⁵ the reader may find the irony hard to ignore. Zimri murdered the king Elah, son of Baasha, by committing treason and destroyed the entire house of Baasha (1 Kgs 16:10-12). Omri, Jezebel's father-in-law, besieged Zimri and Zimri committed suicide during the siege (1 Kgs 16:17-18). His reign lasted only seven days (1 Kgs 16:15). Jezebel is taunting Jehu as a traitor and usurper and hopes for his death and a short reign. The taunt signifies that she is aware of what will become of her—like Elah, she will die—and she prepares in a regal fashion, not in order to seduce the traitor. Marsha C. White aptly states that the scene has seductive overtones but that they are only overtones and not a scene of seduction.⁶⁶ She is not trying to seduce Jehu or join his harem. She is a grandmother who is probably as young as 50 and as old as 75

⁶³ Walter Dietrich, "1 and 2 Kings," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 254.

⁶⁴ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 22; Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Berit Olam; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 2000), 70.

⁶⁵ Else K. Holt, "... Urged on by His Wife Jezebel," *SJOT* 9, 1 (1995): 92-3; and Parker, "Jezebel's Reception of Jehu," 71-72.

⁶⁶ White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu's Coup*, 74 n 60. Camp points out that a reader would not consider that a man in her position who adorns himself with his royal robes and crown would be preparing himself for seduction ("1 & 2 Kings," 110).

years.⁶⁷ Jehu is toppling a royal house and she is fully aware of this fact. The stage is not one of seduction but one of battle.⁶⁸

Another interpretation of Jezebel appearing made-up in the window is the connection with ivory plaques featuring coiffed women gazing through a window. These women were probably priestesses of Astarte/Asherah or representations of the goddess.⁶⁹ Beach notes that goddesses at windows in ancient Near Eastern literature are confronting their own death or the death of another.⁷⁰ Jezebel, therefore, is the representation of the goddess⁷¹ and she either is aware of her own death or hopes for the death of Jehu. Yahweh, through Jehu, however, defeats the foreign goddess.⁷²

Finally, her death comes. Jehu commands the eunuchs behind her to throw her down. Jehu symbolically demotes her from her lofty position.⁷³ Robert L. Cohn writes: “From safety inside to death outside, from the heights to the depths, this movement in the episode expresses the transformation of the political order by the transgression of

⁶⁷ Gaines, “How Bad Was Jezebel,” 24; Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 79; and Eleanor Ferris Beach, *The Jezebel Letters: Religion and Politics in Ninth-Century Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 15.

⁶⁸ Judith E. McKinlay, “Negotiating the Frame for Viewing the Death of Jezebel,” *BibInt* 10, 3 (2002): 306-7.

⁶⁹ Eleanor Ferris Beach, “The Samaria Ivories, *Marzeah* and Biblical Texts,” *BA* 55, 3 (Sept 1992): 130-139; Eleanor Ferris Beach, “Transforming Goddess Iconography in Hebrew Narrative,” in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 239-263; and McKinlay, “Negotiating the Frame for Viewing the Death of Jezebel,” 314-315.

⁷⁰ Beach, “Transforming Goddess Iconography in Hebrew Narrative,” 245.

⁷¹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 161; Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 83; and Parker, “Jezebel’s Reception of Jehu,” 69-70.

⁷² Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 83. Holt argues that Jezebel hopes to be a mate to Jehu as she approaches him as Asherah to his Yahweh-warrior (“Urged on by His Wife Jezebel,” 91-93).

⁷³ Gaines, “How Bad Was Jezebel,” 23

physical boundaries.”⁷⁴ Jezebel’s son Ahaziah accidentally falls through the trellis of his upper room and dies from injuries sustained in the fall (2 Kgs 1:2, 17). When a “hero” literally falls to his death, he is falling from a high social position. Jezebel falling from her high window to her death is both literal and metaphorical.⁷⁵

Jezebel not only tumbles to the ground but her blood spatters on the wall and horses trample her. If there was any question of her surviving the fall, she is dead without doubt from either the fall or the horses. Dogs then eat her, with the exception of her skull, feet, and the palms of her hands. The narrative goes to great lengths to show her death with much shame and humiliation. The passage portrays her as deserving of the death and the humiliation that came with it. God’s word is now fulfilled.⁷⁶

Jehu’s regicide of Jezebel is proof of Jezebel’s lofty position as queen mother. He must remove any potential opponent before he can establish his reign and Jezebel obviously has enormous power in order to taint the northern kingdom so that there is no peace. He has previously identified her as the source of all evil that must be eradicated (2 Kgs 9:22). He cannot purge the nation without purging it of Jezebel. Leaving Jezebel alive leaves open the potential for her continued “fornications and sorceries” and for her to serve as a “rallying point” for anyone wishing to topple Jehu.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cohn, *2 Kings*, 70.

⁷⁵ Gaines, *Music in the Old Bones*, 74

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 388; and Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 79. Arguably, the prophecy is not fulfilled until Athaliah’s death as she is the sole survivor from Ahab’s house after Jehu’s coup.

⁷⁷ Brenner, “Jezebel 1,” 100; Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 77; Gaines, “How Bad Was Jezebel,” 24; and Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 335.

Posthumous recognition of status. Second Kings 10:13 specifically refers to Jezebel as *gěbîrâ* but posthumously.⁷⁸ The brothers of the deceased Judean king Ahaziah approach Jehu and ask to meet the sons of the king and the sons of the *gěbîrâ*. This group of delegates is seeking the sons and brothers of Jehoram in order to speak with the heir to the northern throne. While this passing comment does not play into any judgment levied upon Jezebel, the term bestowed upon Jezebel demonstrates the Judean view of the power and influence of the queen mother. As demonstrated with Maacah, the position vests the mother of the king with great influence and power at the court. As noted above, Asa must remove Maacah from her position as *gěbîrâ* in order to end her influence, and Jehu ends the life of this woman identified specifically as a *gěbîrâ*, albeit posthumously.

Conclusion

While apostasy is her unforgivable sin, Jezebel's actions fulfill all six of Shearing's elements of an evil queen mother. She zealously clings to the political and religious ways of her Phoenician home (first element). Jezebel is a highly politically powerful queen mother (second element), from wielding the king's seal, destroying Yahwistic prophets, to receiving the full blame for all that is wrong with the kingdom. She receives Jehu as a ruler in proper attire while granting an audience like a king. She is extremely aggressive (third element) as she takes what she wants (Naboth's vineyard), ensures the propagation of the Baal cult, and even taunts Jehu as a traitor and usurper. She is an ardent Baal worshipper (fourth element). She is both a liability to her husband and sons (fifth element). Elijah prophesies the end of the entire house of Ahab due to her actions in acquiring Naboth's vineyard. The regnal formula for her son, Ahaziah,

⁷⁸ See the section on the *gěbîrâ* in chapter 2.

declares him evil for following in her ways. Jehoram dies at Jehu's hands presumably due to Elijah's prophecy and because Jehu must rid the kingdom of all that relates to Jezebel. Finally, she is responsible for the deaths of many Yahwistic prophets and the death of Naboth (sixth element). One can logically argue that her influence and tendencies from her time as the king's wife continue into her tenure as queen mother. The only element that the text does not narrate for her as a queen mother is the direct responsibility for a person's death.

For the narrator, her fatal flaw was the inability to recognize Yahweh as the one true God. Second Kings 9:22 is clear that her "fornications and sorceries" are justification for her assassination by Jehu. Gaines writes: "From the Deuteronomist's viewpoint, Jezebel embodies everything that must be eliminated from the northern kingdom so that the purity of the cult of Yahweh will not be further contaminated."⁷⁹ Noting that Jezebel imported foreign worship on a national scale, Frymer-Kensky describes her as "Deuteronomy's Worst Nightmare."⁸⁰

The portrayal of her death is the most telling evidence of the narrator's view of Jezebel. It is not enough that she dies but the graphic nature of her death and the "triple-killing" of her fall, trampling of the horses, and eating by the dogs are still not sufficient for her. The prophets harshly judge the Omride dynasty; yet, none of them receives the kind of punishment Jezebel endures. Of four kings' reigns, the narrator singles her out for blame and utter shame and humiliation. Dutcher suggests that Jezebel is a vehicle for the narrator's theology, "presenting a starkly negative example, the writers' values and commitments, such as covenantal loyalty to God, worship of YHWH alone, respect for the

⁷⁹ Gaines, "How Bad Was Jezebel," 14.

⁸⁰ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 209, 214.

covenantal requirements of equity and justice, and obedience to the voice of YHWH's prophets."⁸¹

Athaliah: The Queen Mother Turned King

Second Kings first mentions Athaliah by name in her son Ahaziah's regnal formula in 8:25-26. The text characterizes Ahaziah as walking in the way of the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 8:27). The queen mother does not appear again until 2 Kgs 11:1-15. She sees that her son is dead and then sets out to destroy the royal family. Jehosheba, Ahaziah's sister, steals away Joash, the son of Ahaziah, before he is killed. For six years, Jehoiada, a high priest, hides Joash in the temple while Athaliah reigns as the illegitimate ruler of Judah. In her seventh year, Jehoiada summons the royal guards to help ensure success in his plan to overthrow Athaliah. He crowns Joash king and then the people declare their approval. When Athaliah hears the noise of the crowd, she goes to the temple and sees the king and the people rejoicing. She then tears her clothes and shouts, "Treason! Treason!" (2 Kgs 11:14). Jehoiada commands the army to kill her but not in the house of Yahweh. She flees through the horses' entrance to the palace and the army puts her to death there.

Who is Athaliah, the Mother of Ahaziah?

The portrait of Athaliah is colored by her familial relations, particularly her parentage. Ahaziah's regnal formula first describes her as the daughter of Omri (2 Kgs 8:26). The text then names her as the daughter of Ahab in the account of Jehoram,

⁸¹ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, x.

Athaliah's husband.⁸² Her first appearance in the text, therefore, is probably one of the verses of Jehoram's regnal formula, which describes Jehoram walking in the ways of Ahab for Ahab's daughter was his wife (2 Kgs 8:18//2 Chr 21:6). Athaliah thus has a conflicting genealogy—whose daughter is she?

Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor argue that Athaliah is the daughter of Ahab and the granddaughter of Omri as “daughter” can also mean “female descendant” as well as being indicative of a biological daughter.⁸³ Athaliah, therefore, would be the daughter of Ahab. Hanna Jacob Katzenstein's meticulous study concludes that she was the daughter of Omri from 2 Kgs 8:26 and 2 Chr 22:2 but that she grew up under Ahab as an orphan, which explains the epithets “daughter of Ahab” and “house of Ahab” in 2 Kgs 8:18, 27; 2 Chr 21:6; and 2 Chr 22:3-4.⁸⁴ Eleanor Ferris Beach suggests that “Daughter of Omri” is Athaliah's throne name so as to avoid the use of the name of her father, Ahab.⁸⁵ Frymer-Kensky suggests that the term may be to identify her as a northerner as

⁸² Donald V. Etz and Spanier posit that Athaliah could have been the wife of Jehoshaphat based on his marriage alliance with Ahab in 2 Chr 18:1 and the lack of naming Athaliah as Jehoram's wife despite her notoriety (Donald V. Etz, “The Genealogical Relationships of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah,” *JSOT* 71 [1996]: 47-49; and Ktziah Spanier, “The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah and Athaliah,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Div A [Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1994], 78; and Ktziah Spanier, “The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court: Athaliah and Abi,” in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* [JSOTSup 273; ed. Meir Lubetski, Claire Lubetski, and Sharon Keller; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 141-2). While a marriage to Jehoshaphat is possible, the marriage alliance probably refers to Jehoram's and Athaliah's marriage given Ahaziah's formula, Athaliah's involvement in his reign, and her usurpation of the throne. Jehoram was thirty-two years old at his ascension and Ahaziah was twenty-years old at his ascension. If Athaliah was married to Jehoshaphat, she would have been approximately sixty to seventy years old when her reign came to an end, a rather unlikely age for a controlling usurper in ancient Israel.

⁸³ Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 98.

⁸⁴ Hanna Jacob Katzenstein, “Who Were the Parents of Athaliah?” *IEJ* 5 (1955): 197. Spanier notes that “daughter” may refer to Ahab's protection of her, such as when 2 Sam 14:27 describes Tamar under the protection of her brother, Absalom (“The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court: Athaliah and Abi,” 141 n 29).

⁸⁵ Beach, *The Jezebel Letters*, 188.

evidenced by the Assyrians who continued to refer to the northern kingdom as the House of Omri even after the death of Ahab and Jezebel.⁸⁶

Whether Athaliah is the sister or daughter of Ahab, the narrator clearly connects the queen mother to the Omride dynasty through her familial relations and thus pronounces her guilty through association. The appellative “house of Ahab” is a standard term for the Omride dynasty. Dutcher-Walls suggests that “(b)y clearly stating Athaliah’s birth origin in that dynasty, the (narrator) argues that Athaliah participates in the evil attributed to the Omrides.”⁸⁷ Athaliah may have been educated under the supervision of Jezebel and, therefore, Jezebel heavily influenced her.⁸⁸ Cogan and Tadmor believe that being the daughter of Jezebel and the appellative “daughter of Ahab” helps explain the promotion of foreign cults in Jerusalem.⁸⁹ Based on Athaliah’s daily witness and possible participation of Tyrian worship in Samaria, the queen mother’s predilection for the cult is plausible based on her early location within the court of Ahab and Jezebel.⁹⁰

Unhappy with the theories that Athaliah was simply a power hungry “queen bee” who was willing to murder her grandchildren in order to greedily take the throne of Judah, many scholars speculate on the reason why Athaliah usurped the throne. The two most prominent theories involve her acting as regent for Joash during those six years of

⁸⁶ Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 85.

⁸⁷ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric*, 69.

⁸⁸ Berlyn, “The Great Ladies,” 30; Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 28; and Katzenstein, “Who Were the Parents of Athaliah,” 197. There is no evidence that Athaliah is the daughter of Jezebel, only that she was the daughter of either Ahab or Omri. White suggests that if Athaliah was the daughter of Jezebel, then the text would claim this identity in order to support the case against her (*The Elijah Legends and Jehu’s Coup*, 72-3).

⁸⁹ Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 98.

⁹⁰ Katzenstein, “Who Were the Parents of Athaliah,” 197.

her reign⁹¹ and, since her marriage was meant to unify the divided monarchy, she attempted to hold onto that unification as queen rather than give up the throne and her own position to Joash and Jedidah, his mother.⁹² While the text leaves some room for

⁹¹ Several scholars argue that Athaliah never usurped the throne but that she reigned as a regent, as a queen mother can, for Joash while the young king was placed in the custody of Jehosheba. Ishida writes: "It is likely, indeed, that Athaliah's massacre of the royal family was not as wholesale as biblical source claims. It is more probable that she put to death only those who might pretend to the throne as rivals of the infant Joash, her own grandson" (*The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel*, 160). Fritz adds: "In any case, the succession of a woman to the throne must have seemed so paradoxical to the Deuteronomistic Historian that he could explain it only by her murdering her own family" (*1 & 2 Kings*, 298). See also Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 138; Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 29; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 164; Mullen, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries*, 28, 30-31; and Stefan Timm, *Die Dynastie Omri: Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Israels im 9. Jahrhundert vor Christus* (FRLANT 124; ed. Wolfgang Schrage und Ernst Würthwein; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 297.

Brenner suggests that since no one from the house of Ahaziah was strong enough to rule after his death (2 Chr 22:9), Athaliah filled the vacancy and stepped in as acting regent but her regency was only temporary as she then took complete control of the throne and sought to eliminate the royal family of Judah (*The Israelite Woman*, 29). While no hard evidence suggests this explanation, the possibility exists as the narrator refuses to acknowledge her reign in any form without wiping out her existence entirely. See Mullen for a discussion on the manipulation of Deuteronomistic Historian's sources for Athaliah's reign (*Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries*, 28). Mullen also posits the possibility that Jehoiada fabricated a Davidic heir in Joash and Joash is therefore the usurper (*Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries*, 31).

Frymer-Kensky posits that Athaliah is actually taking up Jehu's extermination of the Omride dynasty and, therefore, kills those who would become Baal supporters. Her fear of Jehu assassinating her because she was an Omride maybe led her to complete his cleansing of the dynasty known for Baal worship in order to forestall him or Yahwistic supporters from attacking her (*Reading the Women of the Bible*, 86).

⁹² Athaliah's marriage to Jehoram seems to be part of a treaty between the northern and southern kingdoms (Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 295; and Spanier, "The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judean Court: Athaliah and Abi," 141-142). J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes write: "(T)he alliance of Phoenicia, Israel, and Judah implied by the marriage of Jezebel to Ahab and Athaliah to Jehoram may have been essentially a commercial pact for this very purpose" (*A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 279). Jill L. Baker posits this political marriage as a peace settlement to put an end to the political hostilities between the southern and northern kingdoms since the division of the monarchy, even though it was only temporary ("1 & 2 Kings," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* [ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002], 207; see Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 28). Miller and Hayes point out the separation of the kingdoms would hamper the free flow of trade (*A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 267). Spanier offers more evidence for the political arrangement between Athaliah and Jehoram by Omri's treaty with neighbors north of Israel. Omri negotiated with the Phoenicians to the north and the Judeans to the south so that he could engage commerce with them and through them to more remote trading partners. The political marriages consummated these treaties and alliances ("The Queen Mother in the Judean Royal Court: Maacah and Athaliah," 79). Ishida hints that it was more than just a political alliance for free trade but a unification of the two kingdoms. Jehoram and Athaliah establish their reign in full cooperation with the House of Omri. Even after Jehoram's death, the "inhabitants of Jerusalem" enthrone Ahaziah. "It appears that those 'inhabitants of Jerusalem' represented the supporters of the Jehoram-Athaliah regime against the nationalists, called 'the people of the land' . . ." (*The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel*, 159-60).

speculation, the narrator is more obvious with regard to the legitimacy of Athaliah's reign. The narrator recognizes her as a usurping queen and the text does not count her six regnal years under Ahaziah or Joash without critical emendations to the chronological data.⁹³ The narrator, however, never considers her reign as legitimate. The text still uses regnal formulas for those reigns which are determined bad or evil; Athaliah's is not so formally introduced. She is a disruption in the royal Davidic line and Athaliah's reign is an interregnum, one of the few accounts that stand outside of the synchronized reports. The narrator does not coordinate Athaliah's reign with any of the other reigns and does not give any introductory or concluding formula for her that is usually standard for any ruler of the divided monarchy; therefore, she was never a legitimate ruler in the eyes of the narrator.

Athaliah's Roles as Queen Mother

Athaliah's role as queen mother is complicated as well. She moves one step beyond the other queen mothers' roles in that she becomes queen herself. I will focus on the transition from queen mother to queen and the effects of her status as queen mother upon her reign. According to the text, Athaliah is a questionable counselor to her son, has enough political importance and support to become queen, dangerous enough for the high priest to assassinate her, and possibly involved in the cultic activities of Judah.

The counselor of a king. 2 Chronicles 22:3-4 identifies Ahaziah as walking in the ways of the house of Ahab because his mother counseled him in "acting wickedly." He

Athaliah may have usurped the throne to continue the reign of the House of Ahab as part of the treaty made in alliance with northern and southern kingdoms.

⁹³ Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 133-134.

also “did evil” before Yahweh similar to the ways of the house of Ahab for “they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction” (v 4). Athaliah, therefore, acts as a counselor in her capacity as queen mother just as those of the house of Ahab did, although she does so negatively. She could be an unofficial counselor whose advice carried weight with her son or she may have executive power. The text does not indicate if the position is sanctioned by the court or if it depends simply upon the king’s support.

Brenner cites Athaliah’s position with the king as counselor as facilitating her achievement to queen:

She could not have achieved that position without enjoying some measure of political and military support. She therefore must have held a fairly strong position during her son’s lifetime, a position which entailed not only the right to advise but also the ability to exercise royal authority.⁹⁴

Ahlström introduces a religious aspect to Athaliah’s counsellorship, stating that her religious influence is considerable. To act wickedly is to act in a manner contradictory to that prescribed in the Yahwistic cult and Ahaziah must have acted according to his mother’s advice (2 Chr 24:7 calls her “Athaliah the Wicked”). The king is dependent also upon the queen mother in that he listens to the counselors of her kingdom of origin rather than upon his own in Judah.⁹⁵ Ahaziah considers his *mother’s* knowledge and intuition superior enough to seek her advice. Athaliah is undoubtedly a woman of influence after a negative fashion at the court according to 2 Chronicles.

⁹⁴ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 29.

⁹⁵ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 64. Grace I. Emmerson discusses the possibility that her description as a counselor may not refer to an official position because the text qualifies it by “in acting wickedly” (“Women in Ancient Israel,” in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* [ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989], 374). Both Athaliah and the counselors of the house of Ahab, therefore, provide advice to the king by his choice and appointment rather than seeking out the sanctioned counselors of the royal court.

The queen of kings. Although the narrator of 2 Kings does not accept Athaliah's reign as legitimate, she does rule as a monarch of Judah for six years. Second Kings 11:3 uses the verb מלך, of which the nominal form is used for men only, for her rule during that time. When she has the royal family killed, no family member is present to challenge her rule. To step into the role of king and continue in the position, however, she has to have the knowledge and skill to act as the sole ruler for that time.

Many scholars argue that Athaliah uses her position as the mother of the king to ascend to the throne.⁹⁶ First, like other Israelite kings and ancient Near Eastern rulers, she removes the contenders to the throne—Ahaziah's sons.⁹⁷ The installation of a grandson whose mother is living still would remove her from her court position. Her savvy to have the heirs to the throne of Judah eliminated portrays her as having the political power to carry out such a plan.⁹⁸ While the text does not specify who assassinates the royal heirs, their deaths by Athaliah's hand is unlikely; she would have commissioned someone else to murder them. She holds the power to charge someone

⁹⁶ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 63; Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 190; Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 29-30; Buis, *Le Livre des Rois*, 225; Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," 110-111; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 117; Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 368; Molin, "Die Stellung der Gebira im Staate Juda," 164; Mullen, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries*, 28; Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 95-96; and Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 346. Bowen argues not only against Athaliah's power coming from the position of *gēbîrâ* but also as the mother of the king. Athaliah has a strong political base in both the north and the south. In the north, her connections are through Omri and Ahab as daughter and sister. Her murder of the royal family is the *modus operandi* of the northern monarchy. In Judah, her connections are through Jehoram and Ahaziah as wife and mother. According to Bowen, the power to usurp the throne does not come solely through her connection as mother of the king. Given these strong power bases, Athaliah had a strong claim as the one who could unite the divided monarchy; it is not her position as *gēbîrâ* that gives her the power to usurp the Judean throne and hold it for six years ("The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 607). I contend that these connections would mean nothing if Athaliah had not been the mother of the king and learned from her position how to wield the power these connections hold.

⁹⁷ See also Joe E. Lunceford, *Biblical Women—Submissive?* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 77. Lunceford singles out Solomon and Jehu who are praised for their removal of other threats to their throne.

⁹⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric*, 30.

with this immense task. After their deaths, she is free to step into her new role, a role that would need power, knowledge, skill, and support. Her knowledge and political power are not vested to her upon the death of Ahaziah, and they presumably stem from her time as Jehoram's wife and particularly from her tenure as the queen mother.

Athaliah depends upon some support of the leaders of Judah to ensure that she would not be removed from the throne upon her ascension.⁹⁹ It is unlikely that Athaliah garners this type of support in the short time between Ahaziah's death and her ascension to the throne; Athaliah would have been cultivating these relationships as the queen mother. The support that Athaliah acquires prior to assuming the kingship had to continue for her to rule for six years or else dissidents would have overturned her rule quicker. She has to be powerful enough to control the means to maintain her regime. Elna Solvang argues the text gives no indication that Athaliah faces any opposition to her rule externally from foreign powers or internally from Judah.¹⁰⁰ Unfavorable circumstances existed, such as her northern lineage, her gender, and the extinguishment of the house of Ahab and the Yahwist reform in the north under Jehu, but Athaliah overcomes them and rules with a "tight grip" on Judah.¹⁰¹ Even had there been opposition, as Brenner suggests, the narrator does not record it; "(a) six-year reign suggests stability, in contrast to the turnover of rulers recorded in the final years of the

⁹⁹ Athaliah may have relied upon a pro-Israelite party in Judah that had promoted the Judean-Israelite alliance (symbolized by Athaliah's and Jehoram's marriage) and also favored Ahaziah as king. (Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 190; and Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," 111). Gershon Galil argues that Athaliah would not have succeeded in seizing the throne and remaining there if the military and a portion of the government had not supported her (*The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* [Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 9; ed. B. Halpern & M. H. E. Weippert; New York: E. J. Brill, 1996], 47).

¹⁰⁰ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 163.

¹⁰¹ Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties of Ancient Israel*, 160.

kingdoms of Israel and of Judah.”¹⁰² Yet, the ability of Athaliah to gain and hold a stable kingdom for six years is overshadowed by her usurpation, her non-Davidic lineage, and her attempt to exterminate the house of David.

The assassin's target. Jehoiada hatches a plot against Athaliah to install the hidden heir on the throne and then murder her (2 Kgs 11:4-11). He recognizes the potential power of Athaliah after Joash's crowning and realizes the need to have her killed. One might expect the city that had supported her so strongly in the beginning would act to protect her but they do not, especially after Jehoiada's warning that those who follow her will also be killed (2 Kgs 11:15). Athaliah's reign finally ends in the horses' entrance to the house of the king where the captains put her to death. The sole survivor of the house of Ahab is done away with by the reign of the sole survivor of the house of David.

The location of Athaliah's death is reminiscent of horses trampling Jezebel after the eunuchs throw her down from her window (2 Kgs 9:32-33) and brings the entire account of Athaliah full circle to the house of Ahab. Coupled with the destruction of the temple of Baal (2 Kgs 11:18), which I will discuss in the next section, the parallel of her assassination with Jezebel's continues the theme of removing the influences of the house of Ahab from the kingdom. Her death, not Jezebel's, truly fulfills Elijah's prophecy against the house of Ahab. The regicide is not so much justified on religious grounds, as with Jezebel, but on political ones. Instead of allowing her to live in the royal house or possibly act as the queen mother for Joash, Jehoiada must kill her. Even as queen mother, she would be too powerful and influential. Simply remaining alive is too much

¹⁰² Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 163.

for this woman who garnered so much support, knowledge, and skill as a queen mother to become a king. Brueggemann writes: “She threatens the new order and will continue to threaten it as long as she is alive. Hence she must go! And she does!”¹⁰³

The Baal promoter. After Athaliah’s assassination, Jehoiada makes a covenant with Yahweh and the people of the land go to the temple of Baal and pull it down, shattering the altars and the images and killing the priest of Baal (2 Kgs 11:17-18). The text does not specify that Athaliah was the one responsible for the construction of this temple but the text’s implication is that Athaliah is responsible for the worship of Baal.¹⁰⁴

Athaliah’s involvement in cultic worship, however, may be evident in one of the only definitive roles she played as a queen mother. As discussed above, 2 Chr 22:3 states that Athaliah was a counselor to her son during his reign but that she advises him in acting wickedly, which means to act in a way contradictory to the Yahwistic cult. Since the king acts in this contradictory manner, “this may mean that Athaliah’s position in religious affairs was stronger than that of any of her predecessors.”¹⁰⁵ The reader may assume that Athaliah is likely involved in the advisement of cultic activities as the mother of the king and could have ordered the construction of the temple.

¹⁰³ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 411.

¹⁰⁴ Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel,” 396; Baker, “1 & 2 Kings,” 207; Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 92; Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 607; Brenner, “Athaliah,” 55; Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 55; Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 179; House, *1, 2 Kings*, 300; Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women*, 78; Sweeney, *1 & II Kings*, 344; White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu’s Coup*, 72; and Carol Smith, “‘Queenship’ in Israel? The Cases of Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 157. Linda Shearing discusses the possibilities that Athaliah was either a Yahweh or Baal worshipper or a Baal and Yahweh worshipper (“Models, Monarchs, and Misconceptions: Athaliah and Joash of Judah” [Ph.D. diss.; Emory University, 1992], 151-155).

¹⁰⁵ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 64.

Athaliah's heritage also makes her involvement in cultic activities more plausible. The house of Ahab is well-known for its worship of Baal. Athaliah has close connections with the house and the cultic worship she witnessed daily may have heavily influenced her. Even though we have no evidence that she orders the construction of the temple or proclaims the cult official alongside the worship of Yahweh, the narrator equates the worship of Baal with Athaliah, either as the temple builder, a worshipper, or simply by allowing the religion a place in Judah, as the people of the land tear down the temple of Baal as their last action against the queen. Given the text's connection between her reign, her heritage, and the Baal temple, the possibility is not remote that Athaliah is highly involved in the cultic activities of the worship of Baal as the queen mother or that she promotes the worship through the power she acquires as the queen mother and wielded during her queenship.

Conclusion

Athaliah is a unique queen mother in that she transcends her status as the mother of the king and becomes queen herself. The text characterizes her mostly by her heritage as being from the house of Ahab as she is related to Omri and received her education under the house of Ahab and Jezebel. Her action and roles are probably the most diverse as a queen mother, filling all six of Shearing's elements. She is non-Judean (first element) and attempts to destroy the Davidic line (sixth element). During her son's reign, she acts as his counselor, advising him to do wickedly (second and fifth elements and probably connected to the fourth element by virtue of religion). For her to assume the throne successfully, she has to cultivate the knowledge, skill, and support to do so as a queen mother. Her position and power are too influential and dangerous to allow her

continued reign or to serve as the new king's queen mother, and Jehoiada ensures her death (second and third elements). Finally, the text equates her with the temple of Baal since the people who overthrow her then tear down the temple of Baal (the fourth element). Athaliah acts politically and religiously as a queen mother and is in the position to garner enough knowledge and support to become the most powerful woman in the kingdom of Judah by stepping into the role of king but she must murder her grandchildren in an attempt to extinguish the line of David, her ultimate mistake to a pro-Judean narrator.

Nehushta: The Exiled Queen Mother

Nehushta first appears in 2 Kgs 24:8 in the regnal formula of her son, Jehoiachin; it identifies her as the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁶ Immediately after the introduction of Jehoiachin and Nehushta, the narrator imparts judgment upon the king, saying he did evil in the sight of Yahweh (2 Kgs 24:9). Even though he is king for only three months, the judgment is negative. During his reign, Nebuchadnezzar arrives at Jerusalem while his army is in the midst of a siege and Jehoiachin surrenders to him and surrenders his mother, his servants, his officials, and his eunuchs (2 Kgs 24:12). Nebuchadnezzar carries off all the treasures of the temple and the palace as well as the officials, the army, the artisans, and ten thousand captives, all from Jerusalem. Second Kings 24:15 includes an additional list of those carried away into captivity: Jehoiachin,

¹⁰⁶ In Jeremiah, Elnathan is the son of Achbor and appears to be a high court official during Jehoiakim's reign (Jer 26:22; 36:12, 25). His father was involved in Josiah's reform (2 Kgs 22:12-14) and Elnathan was sympathetic to Jeremiah's preaching. The text does not list Elnathan's age and, therefore, the possibility of the man named as Elnathan in Jeremiah is not unlikely to be Nehushta's father as she was the wife of Jehoiakim.

his mother, his wives, his eunuchs, and the leaders of the land. Nehushta, the queen mother, then disappears from the 2 Kings narrative.

Who is Nehushta, the Mother of Jehoiachin?

The Hebrew Bible does not mention Nehushta again by name anywhere else but 2 Kings does not mark the end of her presence in Scripture. Jeremiah 29:2 mentions that the queen mother is also one of those taken away from Jerusalem. Jeremiah 13:18 orders the prophet to say to the king and the *gēbîrâ*, presumably Nehushta, to take a lowly seat because their beautiful crowns have come down from their heads. In Jer 22:24-27, judgment is passed upon Coniah (an alternate name for Jehoiachin) as Yahweh describes their exile to Babylon as hurling the king and his mother who gave birth to him, once again presumably Nehushta, into another country, where they will die. They will not return to the land even though they long to return.

Because we have no evidence to testify otherwise, Nehushta is Jehoiachin's biological mother, especially when Jer 22:26 speaks of the mother who bore him. If the mother who bore him is different from his mother listed in the regnal formula and the 2 Kings account and from the *gēbîrâ* with him in Jer 13, logic dictates that the narrator would identify these different women in some manner to indicate their identities. As such, this woman receives great attention as this king's mother.

Nehushta's Roles as Queen Mother

The text only shows other characters acting upon or for Nehushta and attributes no "off-screen" actions to her. Her roles, therefore, are difficult to determine from these verses alone and the reader must infer the nature of her functions. Her appearance with

the king while wearing a crown of her own indicates her status of importance in the royal court, possibly as a regent for the young king. Her location in the lists in which she occurs suggests a position of prominence. Also, her power was sufficient enough to warrant her exile by Nebuchadnezzar.

The crown of status. The group of oracles in Jer 13 regards God's warning to bring down, humiliate, and shame those who have been the most proud and possess the most status to lose. Consistent with this theme, Jer 13:18 commands the prophet: "Say to the king and the *gēbîrâ*, take (pl.) a lowly seat for your (pl.) crown of beauty has come down from your (pl.) heads."¹⁰⁷ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen and Bowen claim that Nehushta appears with Jehoiachin in this ceremonial moment because she is coregent.¹⁰⁸ Ackerman combines the multiple attestations to Nehushta in Scripture, particularly here in Jer 13:18, coupled with her "exalted status," and determines that the attention is due to her serving as queen regent for Jehoiachin because he is not of proper age to assume the throne. He is only eighteen years old during the three months of his reign according to 2 Kgs 24:8, and 2 Chr 36:9 claims Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign.

From this verse and Jehoiachin's young age, Zafrira Ben-Barak concludes that Nehushta serves as regent and, as a result, the queen mother enjoys great influence in the royal court of Jerusalem. For her, the crown is the explanation of her co-regency and her power at court.¹⁰⁹ Nehushta's appearance beside the king and the presence of a crown

¹⁰⁷ For the argument that the *gēbîrâ* and Nehushta are the same person, see the section regarding the *gēbîrâ* in chapter two.

¹⁰⁸ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 192; and Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 613.

¹⁰⁹ Zafrira Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 38.

prove that she likely serves as a counselor to a king too young to completely assume the throne.¹¹⁰

Ben-Barak argues that only the queen mother would have worn a crown during her co-regency on behalf of her son and, as such, the queen mother did not customarily wear a royal diadem.¹¹¹ As the narrative only briefly mentions Maacah, a physical description of her headdress may not be warranted. Jezebel may have worn a crown when she adorned her hair. Since Athaliah does not reign as a legitimate queen, the narrator may have not seen fit to grant a description of her dress. Also, Jehoiachin wears a crown in Jer 13:18 but not all the kings are described as wearing crowns either but that does not mean they are not kings. The crux of the matter is that the passage pictures Nehushta beside her son wearing a symbol that could very well indicate that she reigned as a queen regent or was a primary counselor to the young.

Also of importance in Jer 13:18 is that the woman beside the king is the *gēbîrâ*. As demonstrated for Maacah, the position of *gēbîrâ* invests a queen mother with great power, enough influence to necessitate removal from the position to cut her off from that power. The oracle is focusing on the loss of position as Yahweh commands both the king

¹¹⁰ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 192; Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 613; and William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (ed. Paul D. Hanson. Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 409. This verse is a part of an oracle of judgment or a lament. While most commentators favor the identity of the royal pair as Nehushta and Jehoiachin, Bowen points out that the text gives no specific time period for this king and the oracle could reflect the defeat and hopelessness of three different crises, in 609, 597, and 587 BCE. These situations also reflect the defeat of the monarchy and deportation. According to Bowen, however, the oracle does reflect the general status of the *gēbîrâ* ("The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 613; see also, Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986], 301-2). The lack of specificity does not detract from the possibility that this oracle is regarding Jehoiachin and his mother and that Nehushta may have served as a queen regent, still garnering her the same status. Solvang claims the passage could refer to either Jehoiachin and Nehushta or Zedekiah and Hamutal (*A Woman's Place is in the House*, 74; see also Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," 33-34). Fretheim agrees with Bowen but states that the text is more than likely referring to Jehoiachin (*Jeremiah*, 210). At minimum, the text describes the function of an unnamed *gēbîrâ*.

¹¹¹ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 32.

and *gēbîrâ* to take a lowly seat for their crown has come down. “Coming down” indicates removal from a position, which invests the *gēbîrâ* with a rank. William L. Holladay notes the importance of height in regards to hierarchy and states that a king who sits in a lowly position is no longer king.¹¹² If the king is no longer a king by virtue of his lower position, then the *gēbîrâ* also loses her official position. Bowen writes: “If the king is the royal man in Judah and Jerusalem of preeminent rank, then by analogy the *gēbîrâ* must be the royal woman of preeminent rank . . . Her appearance with the king and the significance of the (crown) indicate that she is the principal royal woman in the kingdom.”¹¹³

The politically important. Nehushta would have been politically active during her years of regency if she had reigned as queen regent. If she had not been a regent for her son, her character’s particular location in the text may indicate her political importance. In three of her appearances, the text lists the queen mother among politically and economically important people. In 2 Kgs 24:8 and 24:15, she is second in the list of the people the king surrenders. Last, Jer 29:2 lists the king and the *gēbîrâ* (previously established as Nehushta) before other categories of exiles.

With the exception of the wives of the king, all of the people listed in the three verses above are important political or economic positions. The presence of the king’s

¹¹² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 409.

¹¹³ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 614. Bowen, however, argues that this woman of preeminent rank is likely to be the wife of the king.

On another note, Bowen chooses to take the text as a metaphor, investing the crown with symbolic meaning rather than a literal object upon their heads. The crown becomes a metaphor for status, wealth, and dignity. The king and the *gēbîrâ* wear a beautiful crown to signify the status, rank, and preeminence they both hold in the kingdom (“The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 614). The crown as a metaphor may question Nehushta’s position as queen regent without regards to Jehoiachin’s age but the symbolic meaning only serves to enhance her position and power in the court rather than detract from it.

wives may indicate that the mother of the king was only as important as his wives simply by relation.¹¹⁴ One should note that the king's wives are mentioned only in one of the three lists. The queen mother's appearance, however, among the royal court (the king's personal servants, the king's officials, and the king's eunuchs), the leaders of the land, the artisans, and the smiths may indicate even more, in combination with the other verses regarding the queen mother, that she is an economically or, more likely, a politically important person. Ben-Barak argues that the order in the list indicates an order of precedence.¹¹⁵ The verses mention the queen mother immediately after the king in the lists of Judean exiles, possibly vesting her with enough influence to name her as the second most powerful person in the kingdom. Ackerman writes that because of the king and queen mother's condemnation together and the verses listing them first among the exiles, they are the nation's two most powerful authorities.¹¹⁶

The exiled queen mother. As mentioned above, Nehushta appears three times with the people whom Nebuchadnezzar deports to Babylon. The text does not narrate Nebuchadnezzar as deporting all classes of people: only the court and the most important people. The queen mother is important enough in the king's eyes for him to surrender her to Nebuchadnezzar and, from other accounts of the exile and Babylonian history, we know that Nebuchadnezzar deported those who were the most influential politically,

¹¹⁴ One may make the case that the king's wives are politically important as the harem was a sign of kingship. The appropriation of a former king's harem was indicative of the new king's status. For example, Nathan gives Saul's wives to David in proclaiming him king over Saul (2 Sam 12:8). Absalom publicly has intercourse with David's wives as part of his claim upon the kingship (2 Sam 16:20–22). Also, one may interpret Adonijah's request for Abishag, David's concubine, as an attempt to lay claim to the throne (1 Kgs 2:13–25).

¹¹⁵ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the Gēbîrâ," 26.

¹¹⁶ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137.

economically, and religiously, leaving behind the majority of the people who were not wealthy and powerful.¹¹⁷ Ben-Barak points out that “so great was her power that the enemy regarded her as dangerous to the point of meriting banishment together with the sovereign.”¹¹⁸ Leila Leah Bronner agrees when she writes: “(T)he enemy regarded her as equally powerful and dangerous (as the king), to the point of exiling her to Babylon together with the king, the court and important subjects.”¹¹⁹

As Jehoiachin’s punishment is exile, so is Nehushta’s. This equal punishment is most evident in Jer 22:24-27, when Yahweh speaks about hurling them together into another country, but is also evident from the previously discussed Jer 13:18. In these verses, Nehushta receives the same type of judgment as her son even though she never acts or speaks. Her presence beside the king in the oracle in Jer 13 suggests that she may have been held accountable for the type of ruler her son was.¹²⁰ If she served as his counselor, as suggested by the Jeremiah oracles, she can also be held responsible for his actions. This possible responsibility may justify the negative treatment of her character in Jeremiah. Based solely on the 2 Kings text, the reader can only infer her political importance, which may also suggest that she can be held as culpable as Jehoiachin in the surrender of Jerusalem. As discussed above, she may have acted as a regent and counselor and “in that capacity could represent a political point of view that saved city

¹¹⁷ Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 15; and Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 577.

¹¹⁸ Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the Gēbîrâ,” 26.

¹¹⁹ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 54.

¹²⁰ Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical Gēbîrâ,” 613; and Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 96.

and land but made political prisoners of the entire court.”¹²¹ Jeremiah 22:24-27 is the clearest text in the Hebrew Bible of the queen mother’s culpability for the exile of Judah.

Conclusion

For a woman who does not act or speak and is passive under others’ actions who affect her, the text may imply that Nehushta was indeed a powerful woman with a position, one detrimental to the monarchy. Of Shearing’s six elements, Nehushta may fill three of them. The text titles her with the term *gēbîrâ*, vesting her status and rank that Yahweh stripped from her along with the king, demonstrating political power (second element). In the royal court, the queen mother may have served as the king’s counselor and the text lists her foremost, with the king, among the politically and economically important exiles. In Jeremiah, she receives the same judgment as the king. These aspects of her rank and status would constitute aggressiveness (third element), for she would have to show initiative to come under the scrutiny of two authors/editors and Yahweh himself. She was also a liability to her son (fifth element) as she is obviously involved enough in court matters to receive such negative judgment. Whatever power or position she holds, Nehushta is important enough for her son to surrender her, to wear a crown like the king, Nebuchadnezzar to exile her to Babylon, and Jeremiah to declare her culpable in the fall of Judah.

Hamutal: The Calculating Lioness

Hamutal serves as the last queen mother of Judah. She is the second queen mother (Maacah first as a mother and grandmother) to serve twice in the position and the only Judean mother whose two sons succeed to the throne. Second Kings names

¹²¹ Andreason, “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society,” 192.

Hamutal only in the regnal formulas of her sons: Jehoahaz (23:31-34) and Zedekiah (24:17-19; see also Jer 52:1).¹²² She is the daughter of Jeremiah and the text adds that he is from Libnah to distinguish him from Jeremiah the prophet. The text records her character or her actions nowhere else in the books of Kings. It is her appearance in Ezek 19 that makes her important for establishing the *mythos* of a queen mother of the divided monarchy.

Who is Hamutal, the mother of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah?

Little is known about Hamutal. As the mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, she was married to Josiah, which appears to be for a political alliance.¹²³ Because Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old at the time of his succession and his brother Jehoiakim was two years older, scholars have speculated on Jehoahaz's ascension over Jehoakim's with reference to Hamutal's qualities. Brueggemann and Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel note that Hamutal somehow represented a certain palatial faction or enjoyed a favored status.¹²⁴ Ben-Barak and Christopher R. Seitz note that Hamutal could claim a superior lineage to Jehoiakim's Galilean mother, Zebidah, and this lineage determined

¹²² Both 2 Kgs 24:18 and Jer 52:1 spell her name "Hamital." The consensus is that the difference is a scribal error rather than Hamital being a different woman than Hamutal.

¹²³ Libnah had revolted under Jehoram at the same time as Edom, which was a response to Jehoram's attack on the Edomites (2 Kgs 8:21-22). By a high-ranking family of Libnah offering Hamutal to Josiah, Libnah was demonstrating loyalty to Judah and, at the same time, Josiah secured their formerly doubtful loyalty by accepting Hamutal (John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* [OTL; ed. G. Ernest Wright et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 681; Montgomery, *Books of Kings*, 550; and Patterson and Austel, *EBC* 4:290). Sweeney suggests that Josiah married Hamutal to secure the southwestern borders of Judah against Egyptian pressure given Libnah's location in the Shephelah and that Necho's choice of Jehoiakim, whose mother Zebidah is from Rumah in the north, confirms the anti-Egyptian tendency of Josiah, Hamutal, and Jehoahaz (*I & II Kings*, 451).

¹²⁴ Brueggemann, *I & 2 Kings*, 568, and Patterson and Austel, *EBC* 4:290. Patterson and Austel add that the choice of Jehoahaz relied upon Hamutal's place of origin as the people may have hoped Egypt would find him more acceptable than Jehoiakim, whose mother was northern (*EBC* 4:290).

Jehoahaz's precedence per the interest of the "people of the land."¹²⁵ Beyond speculation on her role based upon her marriage and her son's birth order and succession order in 2 Kings, her importance lies outside of the books of Kings. She is a lioness and a vine in the allegorical lament of Ezek 19:1-14.

Hamutal's Role as Queen Mother: Kingmaker

Hamutal seems to have had a *direct* hand in the succession and education of her two sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, according to Ezek 19. Yahweh commands Ezekiel to raise a lament for the princes of Israel. Verse 2 states that their mother was a lioness among lions, indicating her high status and position among male lions or a collective lion pride. As demonstrated in this chapter, the queen mother was the preeminent woman of the kingdom and probably the second most powerful person in the nation. Verse 3 states that she brought up one of her cubs to become a young lion. He learned to tear his prey and eat men. This first lion is captured and dragged away with hooks to Egypt (v 4). So the lioness watches and waits and then takes another cub and makes him a young lion (v 5). He too tears his prey and eats men (v 6). He lays waste to cities, ravaging their widows, and his roar desolates the land (v 7). He is also captured and brought to the king of Babylon in a cage (v 9).

Verses 10-14 describe "your mother" like a vine who was fruitful and abundant. Her stems put forth more than one ruler with one growing above all others (v 11). This vine, however, is uprooted and she withers and dries up before her transplant to the

¹²⁵ Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 30; and Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 27. According to Ben-Barak, Hamutal "successfully exploit(ed) the anti-Egyptian orientation in the kingdom and . . . by obtaining the support of 'the people of the land'" in order to secure Jehoahaz's placement on the throne ("The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 30).

wilderness (vv 12-13). No branch can hold a scepter now (v 14a). Finally, the lament ends with the statement that this passage is a dirge or lamentation and has been used as one (v 14b).

Hamutal appears to be the lioness and vine based upon the fates of the young lions and their relationship.¹²⁶ Simply argued, the two lions are brothers as one mother

¹²⁶ Scholars have widely debated the identity of the princes and their mother(s) in this Ezekielian dirge. Identifying the lioness and the vine with Hamutal is not without its difficulties and scholars vociferously argue among the differing interpretations of whom the two images reference. Ezekiel 19 is not completely clear which kings he is lamenting or even if the princes are meant to refer to historical kings.

Many scholars agree that Hamutal is both lioness and vine, which I consider to be the clearest possibility among the following competing possibilities. For example, see Ben-Barak, "The Status and Right of the *Gēbîrâ*," 30 (addresses lioness only); Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," 33-34; William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker Waco: Word, 1986), 296 (lioness only); Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Westminster Bible Companion; ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 84-85; Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (The Daily Study Bible; ed. John C. L. Gibson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 139-142; Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. Cosslett Quin; ed. G. Ernest Wright et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 251-256; Ingo Kottsieper, "'Was ist deine Mutter?' Eine Studie zu Ez 19, 2-9," *ZAW* 105, 3 (1993): 456-459; and Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 141-2 (addresses lioness only).

The vast majority of scholars who believe the allegory is indeed referring to historical figures agree that the first lion is Jehoahaz; these scholars diverge when identifying the second lion. Considering "brother" to be metaphorical, some argue that he is Jehoiachin (for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* [IBC; ed. James Luther Mays; Louisville: John Knox, 1990], 85) or Jehoiakim (for example, Christopher Begg, "Identity of the Princes in Ezekiel 19: Some Reflections," *ETL* 65, 4 [Dec 1989]: 368).

The identity of the vine is also difficult for scholars. Many opt for Zedekiah as he is the last Judean king. For example, see Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 85; and John A. Goldingay, "Ezekiel," in *The Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 639. Begg is unique in that he argues the vine refers first to Jehoiachin and then to Zedekiah ("Identity of the Princes in Ezekiel 19," 368).

Others consider the lioness and vine to be a metaphor for Jerusalem, Judah, or the Davidic dynasty in general, noting other personifications of Jerusalem and Judah as Yahweh's wife and the role of Judah and Jerusalem as the home of the kings. For example, Ralph H. Alexander, *EBC* 6:830; Pancratius C. Beentjes, "What a Lioness Was Your Mother: Reflection on Ezekiel 19," *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. Bob Becking; Biblical Interpretation Series 18; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 21-35; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 296 (vine only); Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., "Ezekiel," in *The Mercer Commentary on the Bible* (ed. Watson E. Mill and Richard F. Wilson; Macon: Mercer University, 1995), 691; Julie Galumbush, "Ezekiel," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 547-8; Marion Ann Taylor, "Ezekiel," in *The IVP Women's Commentary* (ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002), 409; and Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24* (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; ed. Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 394.

Even with these competing interpretations, the lioness and the vine remain queen mothers. Whether the queen mothers depicted are Hamutal, Zebidah, and/or Nehushta, they still demonstrate an active role in teaching their sons their wicked ways and placing them on the throne. Even if Judah, Jerusalem, or the Davidic dynasty is the lioness and/or vine, the personification takes on a double-

sees two of her lions become king. The only kings to share a mother are Jehoahaz and Zedekiah. With regards to their fates, Pharaoh Necho deposes Jehoahaz and takes him to Egypt (2 Kgs 23:33-34). The Babylonian army captures Zedekiah and brings him to Nebuchadnezzar, who kills Zedekiah's sons, blinds him, and then carries him to Babylon in fetters (2 Kgs 25:5-7). Zedekiah is not the only king an army "captures" and Nebuchadnezzar exiles. The key here is that these lions are brothers. Also, Jehoiachin's reign was too short and he was confined inside Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege for his entire reign. He could not make cities desolate and lay with their widows. While 2 Kings, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel do not describe Zedekiah's actions, only that he was wicked, he has the greater opportunity between the remaining four kings to perpetrate such crimes.

The identification of the strongest shoot on the vine appears to be Zedekiah. The phrase, "your mother," links the two parts of the allegory. The two images are not incongruent or inconsistent, suggesting a new identity for the mother, as Gen 49 uses the same two images to describe Judah. The two metaphors complete each other; the lion cubs describe the fate of the mother's sons and the vine describes *her* fate.¹²⁷ Her success or failure depends upon her sons' success or failure.¹²⁸ As the suffix appended to "mother" is 2nd person, masculine, singular, the lament is addressing one son, the last son of the kingdom as his death ends the royal line (v 14a). Also, the statement that no more

meaning—these entities are both a lioness/vine and a queen mother. The nation, city, or dynasty is a female and the mother of kings, i.e., a queen mother.

¹²⁷ While the images appear together in Gen 49 and the second metaphor completes the story, the second image, according to Eichrodt, is "not directly enough connected with what preceded it for it to form the third paragraph of the lament and thus introduce a third prince" (*Ezekiel*, 256).

¹²⁸ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 297; and Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 251.

scepters will grow from the vine's branches (v 14a) insinuates the death of all of Zedekiah's sons as there are no more descendants to assume the throne.¹²⁹

What is especially poignant about this allegory is that the lament may have the princes as its subject, but the reader views their downfall and the demise of the nation through the eyes of the queen mother. Since she appears as both the lioness for two kings and the vine for the second king, the lament is more about her than kings, especially as the climax is her own demise. She is more than just a witness to the end of the kingdom as she, too, meets her end.¹³⁰ William H. Brownlee and Ronald E. Clements argue that this lament is not truly for the princes but for Hamutal as the reader views the events through her eyes and the poem ends with her own death. Both cite v 14b and claim that the statement "this is a dirge and it is used as a dirge" to be a literal claim and refers to the lament over the death of the main human character: Hamutal.¹³¹

According to this allegory, Hamutal is responsible for her sons' education as she trains them in order to make them king. But that education results in the kings' learning

¹²⁹ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 257; Goldingay, "Ezekiel," 639.

¹³⁰ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Ezekiel," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 195.

¹³¹ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 298, 305; and Clements, *Ezekiel*, 83-4. Clements assumes that Hamutal was also in exile in Babylon as she was alive to witness Zedekiah's death. He believes Jer 29:2 references Hamutal as part of the royal household in the list of those carried into captivity. The poem demonstrates how her ambitious plans came to naught. Clements writes: "Since the poem opens by referring to her august and powerful reputation, we can conclude that Ezekiel's allegory was intended as an obituary for her and a warning to others regarding the dangers of excessive human ambitions" (*Ezekiel*, 84).

Brownlee offers an elaborate argument for how and why Ezekiel would be lamenting the queen mother Hamutal. He states that Hamutal was not exiled to Egypt with Jehoahaz or to Babylon with Zedekiah because the text did not record such an event as it did with Nehushta. Just as one might assume, then, that she died before either of the exiles, Brownlee claims that it is just as reasonable to consider that she was sent to live in Egypt with her son for safety's sake before the Babylonian siege. As Ezekiel mentions sending ambassadors to Egypt in 17:15, Hamutal may have easily accompanied them, adding a sense of prestige to the delegation. The queen mother, therefore, would still be alive when Ezekiel visited Egypt. She probably died there in her sixties and Ezekiel adapted his lamentation of the lioness for a literal funeral dirge for the queen mother. He may have come to know Hamutal and sympathizes with Jehoahaz over her death (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 298).

from her to devour people. The implication is that the second son also learned to ravage cities and widows. Marion Ann Taylor writes: “(H)er role as an ambitious, perhaps controlling, yet effective trainer is underlined.”¹³² Also, Hamutal was instrumental in placing not one but two kings upon the throne. The text explicitly states that the former queen mother chooses a second cub and sets (qal perfect, 3fs, ׁׂ׃) him as a young lion. While neither Kings nor Chronicles acknowledges this kingmaker role, Ezekiel describes an active queen mother intervening.¹³³ Pancratius C. Beentjes notes how laments are adapted in the Hebrew Bible as accusations against a person or group “by God’s order.”¹³⁴ Indeed, the lament carries a strong accusation against the mother—she teaches her sons to devour people and ravage cities and widows. Her ambition of placing two sons on the throne indirectly results in the demise of the royal line. Peter C. Craigie notes that both Zedekiah and Hamutal failed at their given tasks and the royal line now has no future hope.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Given the context of the passage and the fates and actions of the young lions in Ezek 19:1-4, Ezekiel is speaking of Hamutal’s explicit involvement in seeing that two of her sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, assume the throne of Judah. The allegories are not simply laments but are indictments against the monarchy, including the queen mother.

¹³² Taylor, “Ezekiel,” 409.

¹³³ The fact that Nebuchadnezzar places Zedekiah on the throne does not remove any influence of Hamutal’s part. We are unaware of how far her influence or power as a former queen mother extends in convincing Babylonian officials to choose Zedekiah over any other possible candidates.

¹³⁴ Beentjes, “What a Lioness Was Your Mother,” 22.

¹³⁵ Craigie, *Ezekiel*, 142. Eichrodt writes that Hamutal’s concern in making two of her sons king is over the security for safety of the nation (*Ezekiel*, 255). If she was concerned with the nation’s safety, would she have taught her sons to devour people, which the allegory insinuates is not proper?

Hamutal is responsible not only for securing the throne for her sons but also teaching them their wicked ways. They learned from her to tear their prey and devour people and the second young lion may have learned from her how to desolate cities. Hamutal demonstrates four of Shearing's six elements of a wicked queen mother. Hamutal is especially politically powerful (second element) and aggressive (third element) in her ability to explicitly involve herself in the succession of her second son as a former queen mother. She seems to be a liability to her sons (fifth element) as Ezekiel's lament indicts her for what she teaches and for advancing them. Lastly, she is indirectly responsible for the death of others (sixth element) as she taught her sons to kill others. Like Athaliah and Jezebel, Hamutal asserts herself beyond her tenure as queen mother and pursues the succession of her second son to the throne.

Conclusion

Of the fifteen queen mothers who appear in the regnal formulas for the Judean monarchy, only four appear outside of their naming in the formulas: Maacah, Athaliah, Nehushta, and Hamutal (in Ezekiel only). For all of the northern monarchy, only one queen mother, Jezebel, appears in any of the kings' accounts. This chapter has demonstrated how the narrator negatively portrays each of these queen mothers. Their few appearances outside of 1 and 2 Kings also demonstrate a negative view, such as with Nehushta appearing in Jeremiah and Hamutal appearing in Ezekiel. Rather than reiterating all the actions of these five queen mothers, the table below (Table 1. The Queen Mothers of the divided monarchy and Shearing's Elements of a Bad Queen/Queen Mother) demonstrates Shearing's six elements that she determined are the main characteristics of what constitutes a wicked queen mother. Two mothers fill all six

elements while one mother each fills three to five elements. When one combines these negative portrayals of the queen mother with the regnal formulas, the image emerges of a powerful woman who holds enormous influence in her respective court, particularly in Judah.

Table 1. The Queen Mothers of the Divided Monarchy and Shearing's Elements of a Bad Queen/Queen Mother

| Queen Mother | Non-Judean | Politically powerful | Aggressive | Asherah or Baal Worship | Liability to Son(s) | Responsible for Others' Death(s) |
|--------------|------------|----------------------|------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Maacah | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Jezebel | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Athaliah | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Nehushta | | X | X | | X | |
| Hamutal | | X | X | | X | X |

The regnal formulas have many purposes, such as a systematic way of recounting ancient Israel's history. One of their main purposes is to serve as a theodicy: Why are the ancient Israelites in exile? They are in exile due to the monarchy's repeated infractions against the covenant. The formulas evaluate the kings, who consistently do evil or qualified evil, mostly in the form of covenant infidelity. The kingdoms of Israel relies on the preeminent male of the monarchy—the king—to lead them and to fulfill the law within his reign. The preeminent female of the court—the queen mother—is the second most powerful person in the kingdom. In this enormously influential position of *gēbîrâ*, she receives a mention in the regnal formulas.

The lack of details for each queen mother in the regnal accounts suggests that the queen mother's actions are negligible for the most part. Yet, when the queen mother

does appear, she is a liability to the nation. Her actions are consistent with the actions of other kings whom the text judges negatively. Second Kings 17:7-23, 21:3-16, and 24:3-4 detail actions of the people and the kings that resulted in the exile. The queen mothers' deeds precisely mirror some of these accusations. Maacah erects an image to Asherah (see 2 Kgs 17:10; 21:3, 7); Jezebel worshipped Baal (see 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3); and Athaliah allowed the worship of Baal (see 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3). Jezebel, Athaliah, and Hamutal are responsible for the deaths of innocent people (see 2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4).

What is most evident with regards to their actions is that they are liabilities to their sons. They propagate a foreign cult, counsel their sons wickedly, ensure the death of their sons, and kill possible heirs, all of which bring a negative judgment upon their sons' reigns (unless rectified as with Asa and Maacah). The book of Jeremiah blames Nehushta, along with her son, for the downfall of the nation of Judah! They are more than liabilities to their sons as they are liabilities to the nation. The queen mothers of the divided monarchy are inherently evil. The text characterizes each of them negatively and names them in the formulas that characterize the monarchy as wicked for its breaking of the covenant. Even when these women appear in other places in Scriptures, they are still wicked. The regnal formulas, the texts in 1-2 Kings detailing four queen mothers' exploits, and additional references outside of the books of Kings combine to show a *mythos* surrounding the queen mother of the divided monarchy: she is wicked. First and Second Kings and the Scriptures in general typecast the queen mother of the divided monarchy as wicked by virtue of being the preeminent female of a kingdom that routinely disregards faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant.

CHAPTER FIVE

Good Women *Do* Make History: Queen Mothers Outside of the Divided Monarchy

The queen mothers of the divided monarchy are not the only royal mothers to appear in the Hebrew Bible. The first queen mother of the monarchy the text acknowledges is Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1-2). Also, Prov 31:1-9 records the advice of the mother of King Lemuel but not his father's wise words. The text depicts the queen mother of Belshazzar as a wise woman (Dan 5:10-12). One can make the case that Sarah, Abraham's wife, serves as a sort of queen mother for the ancestral promise and the nation of ancient Israel. I will first explore Sarah's characterization as a queen mother and then the roles of Bathsheba and the mothers of Lemuel and Belshazzar. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the text characterizes differently the royal mothers who are not queen mothers of the divided monarchy. These women act in a vastly contradictory manner than Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, Nehushta, and Hamutal. These "good" royal mothers help to demonstrate what it means *not* to be a queen mother of the divided monarchy, which reinforces the *mythos* of a queen mother whose son is a king during the time of the divided monarchy.

Sarah: The Proto-Queen Mother

In Gen 16, Sarah¹ gives her servant, Hagar, to her husband so that the servant may conceive and produce an heir. Sarah finds the consequences of her actions to be not as pleasant as she had hoped in that Hagar reacts in a condescending manner. Sarah reacts

¹ For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the matriarch as "Sarah" rather than "Sarai" and mean no intentional ignorance of the name change. I will later address the importance of the name change in regards to the divine promise.

harshly, creating the impetus for a pregnant Hagar to flee the situation. In the wilderness, Hagar encounters an angel of the LORD and explains her situation, to which the angel commands her to return. These nine verses refer to Sarah as Hagar's "mistress" or *gēbîrâ* (גבירה) three times (vv 4, 8, 9).

When comparing the meaning and context of *gēbîrâ* with Sarah's story, what becomes evident is that Sarah's story corresponds to the majority of the contexts of the use of *gēbîrâ* where succession of an heir is involved, which is that of the position of the queen mother. In order to demonstrate this similarity, I will explore briefly the queen mother's involvement in succession. Then, I will investigate Sarah's story where *gēbîrâ* first appears through to the securing of her son and Abraham's heir, Isaac. The implications of this comparison is that the narrator's choice of *gēbîrâ* foreshadows Sarah as the chosen matriarch who will carry the promised heir and justifies the actions she takes in order to secure the succession of her biological son.

The Meddling Queen Mother: The Mother of the Future King and Succession

In the previous chapter, I focused upon the roles of the queen mother in her transition from wife of the king to mother of the king and during her tenure as queen mother. The text overwhelmingly characterizes the actions of the queen mothers who appear outside of the regnal formulas as negative, acting in the manner of other kings receiving a negative or qualified evaluation. Here, however, I will focus on the involvement of queen mothers in the succession of their sons, of which the narrator may be negative, positive, or neutral.

Bathsheba serves as the perfect example for a queen mother who interferes in the succession of a son (1 Kgs 1-2). When Adonijah, son of Haggith, proclaims himself

king, she petitions David to name her son, Solomon, as king, and David grants her petition. After Solomon's ascension, she maneuvers Adonijah, whom Solomon spared, into a precarious position with his request of Bathsheba to petition Solomon to give him Abishag, David's last wife. Solomon interprets the request as designs upon his throne and has Adonijah, his chief rival, executed.²

Maacah appears to intervene in the succession of her son, Abijam. According to the Chronicler, Maacah was married to Rehoboam, who had eighteen wives; the compiler only names Maacah and Rehoboam's primary wife, Mahalath. Second Chronicles 11:19 states that Mahalath bore Rehoboam three sons. Rehoboam then marries Maacah, the daughter of Absalom. The text states that Rehoboam loved Maacah more than his other wives and concubines (2 Chr 11:20-21). Immediately following this statement, the narrator reports that he appoints Abijam, son of Maacah, as his heir (2 Chr 11:22). While he is by far not the oldest son, Rehoboam chooses him as king, seemingly due to his love for Maacah considering the proximity of the statement of his love and Abijam's appointment. It appears that Maacah is somehow behind this selection.³

Jezebel is involved in the succession in three different ways. The narrator mentions her as the only wife of Ahab although he fathered at least seventy sons. Ahab likely had multiple wives like the other kings of the northern and southern monarchies and many of those seventy sons could likely inherit the throne. Yet, it is her two sons, Ahaziah (1 Kgs 22:51) and Jehoram (2 Kgs 3:1), who succeed Ahab one after the other.

² See the section below on Bathsheba for an in-depth analysis of her role in Solomon's succession and securing the kingdom against outside threats.

³ For more on Maacah as the favored wife, see Zafira Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," in *La Femme Dans le Proche-Orient Antique* (ed. J. M. Durand; Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987), 34; Linda Shearing, "Queen," *ABD* 5:585; and Ktziah Spanier, "The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah—A Case Study," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (FCB; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 191.

Patricia Dutcher-Walls writes: “She alone among all those contending to place their own candidate on the throne had the skill and force to determine the succession.”⁴ Also, 2 Kgs 10:13 specifically refers to Jezebel as *gēbîrâ* in regards to a matter of succession, when a group of Judean men seek the ones who could function as an heir to the northern throne, particularly whoever has the strongest claim for succession.⁵ Jehoram’s sons are the most favorable candidates but Jehoram was a brother who became king rather than as the chosen son. They are seeking his sons and his brothers, the sons of Jezebel, the *gēbîrâ*.⁶

Hamutal seems to have had a direct hand in the succession of her two sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah. Ezekiel describes Hamutal’s direct involvement in these two successions in Ezek 19:1-9. In this passage, a lioness sees two of her cubs become young lions. Her first son is captured and taken away to Egypt (v 4), so *she* makes another cub a young lion (v 5), who is also captured but taken away to Babylon (v 9). Given the context of the passage and the fates and actions of the young lions, Ezekiel is speaking of Hamutal’s explicit involvement in seeing that two of her sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, assume the throne of Judah.⁷

⁴ Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen* (ed. Barbara Green; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2004), 128.

⁵ Nancy R. Bowen, “The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” *CBQ* 63, 4 (Oct 2001): 611.

⁶ See the section on the *gēbîrâ* in chapter two for the argument that the *gēbîrâ* in 2 Kgs 10:13 is indeed Jezebel, which Bowen opposes (“The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 611).

⁷ See the section on Hamutal in chapter four for an in-depth analysis of Ezek 19 and her involvement in the succession of her sons.

While primogeniture is the general principle that determines succession, succession does not always follow this rule on more than a few occasions.⁸ There is ample evidence of kings owning harems: Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3); Rehoboam had 18 wives and 60 concubines (2 Chr 11:21); and Abijam had 14 wives (2 Chr 13:21). The text does not list the number in the harems of the following kings: Saul (2 Sam 3:7; 12:8), David (2 Sam 3:2-5; 5:13; 11:27; 15:16; 16:21-22; 20:3), Ahab (1 Kgs 20:3-7), Jehoiachin (2 Kgs 24:15), Jehoram (2 Chr 21:14, 17), and Zedekiah (Jer 38:23). Considering the above examples of disuse of primogeniture, any one son (or two sons) from all those produced by the women of the harem can emerge as the next king. The king's favor among his many wives appears to play a major role in determining a different heir. This choice is where royal wives, particularly favored wives, legitimately enter in placing their sons upon the throne.⁹

With more than one wife, conflict among the king's wives over whose son would assume the throne appears reasonable. Patricia J. Berlyn states that it would seem then that the wife with the most favor or who could hold the affections of her husband could place her own son on the throne.¹⁰ Dutcher-Walls writes that the mothers involved themselves in political battles by influencing enough partisans among the court officials and factions to support her son and crown him. Otherwise, power struggles resulted in

⁸ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *CBQ* 45 (Apr 1983): 189; and Shearing, "Queen," *ABD* 5:585.

⁹ Elna Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup 349; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 46-47.

¹⁰ Patricia J. Berlyn, "The Great Ladies," *JBQ* 24, 1 (Jan-Mar 1996): 27.

open warfare and the succession was decided through civil war.¹¹ Nancy R. Bowen argues that a son's claim to the throne partially relied on the status and rank of his mother and, therefore, wives might be ranked to ensure order of succession.¹² In Ktziah Spanier's discussion of a wife's transition to queen mother, she writes that the woman "whose familial associations provided the most favorable terms for the Judaeen king was the one who received the title of chief wife. . .it brought about the appointment of her son as the successor to the throne, regardless of his chronological position among the king's progeny."¹³

In her study regarding succession, Zafrira Ben-Barak concludes: "(T)he figure of the mother of a younger son with no legitimate claim to the succession emerges as a major power who exerts her influence and acts on behalf of her son's accession to the kingship."¹⁴ The biblical text is a prime example of this statement as Bathsheba, Maacah, and Hamutal see one of their sons rise to become king over legitimate heirs who are older sons. As *gēbîrâ*, Jezebel's sons may again succeed to the throne after the deaths of two reigning sons in the aftermath of Jehu's coup. Hamutal manages to place a second son on a vacant throne. Each of these women was one of many wives and each son one of many. Yet, each emerges as queen mother with *her* son reigning rather than an older child of their husband or another kinsman.

¹¹ Dutcher-Walls, *Jezebel*, 128.

¹² Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*," 603. Spanier writes: "When the polity representing the woman was in a superior position to the other, she would assume the position of chief wife upon her arrival, and her son would be the heir apparent to the throne, regardless of his hierarchical position among her agnatic siblings" ("The Northern Israelite Queen Mother in the Judaeen Court: Athaliah and Abi," in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon* [JSOTSup; ed. Meir Lubetski, Claire Lubetski, and Sharon Keller; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 136).

¹³ Spanier, "The Queen Mother in the Judaeen Royal Court: Maacah," 187.

¹⁴ Ben-Barak, "The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne," 36.

Sarah vs. Hagar: The “Queen Mother” of the Promise?

When one begins to compare Sarah and the queen mothers in the areas of succession, one finds that they are not all too dissimilar as both Sarah and the queen mothers fight to control the succession of their sons as the next heir and to secure their place as primary wife/mother of the promise or the first lady of the kingdom. The following section will look closely at Sarah’s struggle in her son’s succession and what the study of *gēbîrâ* in relation to the queen mothers can offer for Sarah as *gēbîrâ*.

Genesis 16 opens with a repeated note of Sarah’s barrenness. Thirty-five years have passed since Abraham and Sarah left Haran. God delivered the promise to Abraham ten years out of Haran, again with the text emphasizing Sarah’s infertility as he cannot become a great nation through her. At this point, the remedy appears to come from Sarah’s actions rather than her womb. She does not lament the situation and moves to a solution of her own creation, that of Abraham procreating with Hagar. Abraham does not object, either to her statement of creating children for herself or to her suggestion.

Sarah states *she*, not Abraham, will obtain children through Hagar (v 2). Because Hagar is the property of Sarah (indicated through the use of הַאִשָּׁה), juridically, any son that Hagar produces will belong to Sarah as if he is biologically hers. This method of obtaining children is not unattested as elsewhere we have Rachel and Leah in Gen 29-30 giving their maidservants to Jacob even though he already has sons. Sarah solves the problem of family continuity by producing a child, even if he is the biological child of her maidservant. Athalya Brenner writes: “So far Sarah has behaved prudently. In her kind of society an individual has no power if he/she is not protected by the family.

Therefore, family continuity is a supreme value that ought to override matters of personal happiness or fulfillment.”¹⁵

Sarah has little to no option to gain a son for herself and this course of action is a function of her gender and her social status as a woman who is married to a man of wealth and who owns at least one servant.¹⁶ Both of these status markers advance her plan to raise her status higher by becoming a mother because a wife who does not bear children does not fulfill her duty.¹⁷ Mignon R. Jacobs writes: “(O)ne need not see Sarah’s plan to have a surrogate as *exclusively* for the sake of the Deity’s plan for Abraham. Rather, her infertility and her obligation to Abraham would have been a dire concern, a concern that would constitute the expediency of her plan” (emphasis added).¹⁸

While Sarah is fully cognizant that she is barren as she gives her maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a wife, she is not so aware of the change in relationship dynamics that her actions bring about. When Hagar is aware of her pregnancy, her attitude changes and she begins to slight her mistress (*gēbîrâ* in the text, v 4), maybe to the point of acting as a freewoman as she is now pregnant and the wife of Abraham.¹⁹ Hagar treats Sarah as unimportant or insignificant, quite possibly due to Sarah’s childlessness, as Hagar has

¹⁵ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 92-93; see also Christiana de Groot, “Genesis,” in *The IVP Women’s Commentary* (ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002), 11.

¹⁶ In explaining Hagar’s status, Jacobs states that if Hagar was infertile, she could not conscript Sarah, because of her privileged status, or another slave to bear her children (*Gender, Power, and Persuasion: The Genesis Narratives and Contemporary Portraits* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 135).

¹⁷ Phyllis Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (ed. Walter Brueggemann et al; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 26.

¹⁸ Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 135; see also, Philip R. Drey, “The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16,” *AUSS* 40, 2 (Aut 2002): 186.

¹⁹ John H. Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 103.

“the one thing that Sarah cannot achieve—the honor that is ascribed to a pregnant woman in a society that values and needs children so highly, and especially the honor that comes from carrying the child of the head of the household.”²⁰ Claus Westermann states that the usual translation of “despised” for לָקָהּ is too strong as a woman’s status rises when she becomes pregnant; he adds, “Natural maternal pride now finds expression, and Sarah is offended.”²¹ Sarah appeals to Abraham to do something about this situation but he puts the onus back on her. Her response is to treat her maidservant “harshly” (as usually translated), sending Hagar fleeing into the wilderness.

What is at play here is not pettiness but a power struggle for status as Hagar’s pregnancy causes a reordering of the structure of Abraham’s family.²² Hagar’s status in relation to Sarah is more than a surrogate pregnancy on behalf of a servant. Hagar’s pregnancy has challenged Sarah’s superior status as the primary wife. In Gen 16:3, Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham as a wife (אִשָּׁה). The text uses the same noun to describe Sarah as Abraham’s wife earlier in v 3. The narrator, however, does not use the word for concubine (פְּלִיטָה). I concur with Robert Alter when he writes: “The terminological

²⁰ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 15-16; see also Jo Ann Hackett, “Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 13; and Shera Aranoff Tuchman and Sandra E. Rapoport, *The Passions of the Matriarchs* (Jersey City: KTAV, 2004), 17.

²¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (trans. David E. Green; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 124. J. Cheryl Exum uses “arrogant” for לָקָהּ (“Mother in Israel’: A Familiar Story Reconsidered,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* [ed. Letty M. Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985], 76). See also, Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 6.

²² Drey, “The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16,” 190.

equation of the two women is surely intended, and sets up an ironic backdrop for Sarai's abuse of Hagar."²³

Sarah must now act to guarantee her position as the primary wife.²⁴ First, she takes her case to Abraham (Gen 16:6). His answer is that her maidservant is in her hands and Sarah should do as she sees fit. Note that Abraham uses "servant" (הַפְּדָוָה) in referring to Hagar. He is returning Hagar to her status as a maidservant rather than a wife; now, she is not at the same level as Sarah in his eyes.²⁵ Sarah then proceeds to treat Hagar as if she is no longer at the status of a wife. The text uses הָרַעַב to describe Sarah's actions; the verb can mean "to be bowed down or afflicted."²⁶ The translation, "harshly," loses some of the verb's connotation. Whatever actions Sarah took, they were afflictive enough to drive a pregnant Hagar away into the wilderness. Considering the connotation of being low or bowed down, however, the verb means that Sarah reduces Hagar's status. Abraham gives her permission to reduce Hagar's status by referring to her as a maidservant, not a wife, and then Sarah proceeds to treat her in a lower manner by possibly removing her social standing and/or the benefits of a maidservant.²⁷ Sarah actively ensures her superior position despite her maternal status.

²³ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), 68. Drey notes that this change in terminology suggests a contract between the husband and the mistress as well as a social status change for the maidservant ("The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16," 185).

²⁴ Exum, "Mother in Israel," 76.

²⁵ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 320.

²⁶ *BDB*, 776.

²⁷ Drey, "The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16," 191; and Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 46. Otwell and Schneider note a law in the Code of Hammurabi (section 146-147) where the slave-girl of a priestess who bore a child to the priestess' husband begins to act equal to the priestess. The priestess may

While in the wilderness, Hagar encounters an angel of the LORD and, in this passage, both Hagar and the angel use *gēbîrâ*. Hagar is fleeing Sarah the *gēbîrâ*, assured of her status as primary wife, and the angel commands Hagar to return to the *gēbîrâ*. Since *gēbîrâ* functions with the connotation of the first lady in the kingdom or household or simply “queen mother,” the term denotes Sarah’s return to preeminent status and also serves as foreshadowing. The narrator has deemed Sarah barren twice and God has not delivered the promise that she will carry Abraham’s child (Gen 17:15-16). Hagar and the narrator, in essence are acknowledging prophetically that Sarah, not Hagar, will become the mother of the divine promise. The overtones of the queen-mothership do not end here.

Hagar returns to her *gēbîrâ* and she gives birth to her son, Ishmael. In Gen 17, however, we learn that Ishmael is not the child of the promise, and God promises again to make Abraham a great nation and the sign of the covenant becomes circumcision. God does not leave Sarah out of the covenant this time. Genesis 17:15-21 declares the promise will come through Sarah. She receives a new name, a less archaic form of Sarai. God chooses Sarah as the mother of the chosen people and God does not simply subsume her under Abraham nor leave her out of the equation considering Abraham already has a son, a son that Abraham assumed to be the child of the promise.²⁸

mark her as a slave if she does so and continue to count her among her slaves, not as her husband’s concubine (Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 103; and Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 28).

²⁸ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIB* 1:459; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Sarah1/Sarai,” *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament* (ed. Carol Meyers; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 151.

Sarah's new name, which God gives her, holds a key to her royal status. Nahum M. Sarna writes that *sār* (סָר) means "prince/ruler" and may, therefore, relate to Sarah.²⁹ Elna Solvang states that the feminine of *sār* is *sārā* (סָרָא) and calls attention to how the text has used it to refer to queens of other nations as parallel to kings in Isa 49:23, and Solomon had seven hundred wives and *sārôt*, whom Solvang argues were princesses from foreign kingdoms that Solomon married.³⁰ Her name, therefore, probably has the connotation of "princess"³¹ as *gěbîrâ* has a connotation of "queen mother."

God confers this new royal name upon Sarah in the same two verses that he declares that she is the one who will give birth to the promised son. Not only will she be the bearer of the promise, but God also states that great nations and kings will come from her. In essence, she is the mother of these great nations and kings. To be the mother of the king is to be the queen mother and to be the queen mother is to be the *gěbîrâ*. With God's announcement and the conferring of a royal name, however, God has chosen Sarah, not Hagar, to serve as ancient Israel's *gěbîrâ*.

After the birth of Isaac, all seems right as the child of promise has arrived and Sarah has regained her status as an actual mother.³² Yet, Hagar and Ishmael still lurk as a threat in the background. A scene between Isaac and Ishmael sparks a concern in Sarah regarding her son's inheritance. The text uses *קָרַב* to describe their interaction and it is

²⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 126.

³⁰ Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House*, 73.

³¹ William D. Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 352.

³² William E. Phipps, *Assertive Biblical Women* (Contributions in Women's Studies 128; Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 12.

translated variously as playing, making sport, mocking, and sexually abusing. Jo Ann Hackett suggests that, since the verb is a play on Isaac's name, Ishmael was "Isaac-ing," that is, he was doing something "to indicate he was just like Isaac, that they were equals."³³

This interpretation seems especially important in that, through Ishmael's actions, Sarah comes to the recognition that Ishmael will share in Isaac's inheritance (Gen 21:10). This legitimately recognized son, albeit not biologically Sarah's, threatens Isaac by merely being present.³⁴ According to the Code of Hammurabi, the sons of a slave-wife share equally with the sons of a free woman if the father legitimates them; if he does not recognize them as his sons, he must give them their freedom.³⁵ Sarah's concern is a "question of dynasty."³⁶ Sarah views Ishmael as a threat to her son's inheritance and she seeks to have them removed by once again appealing to Abraham.³⁷ Abraham is reluctant to drive Hagar and Ishmael away, as he still recognizes Ishmael as his son, but God instructs him to do so with the promise that God will make a great nation of Ishmael as well (Gen 21:13). According to God, Hagar and Ishmael are a threat to the divine promise as Isaac will continue Abraham's line (Gen 21:12).³⁸

³³ Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar," 20-21.

³⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 156.

³⁵ Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 156; and Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 34-35. See Drey for a discussion of how these verses are concerned with the sharing of Sarah's dowry with Ishmael ("The Role of Hagar in Genesis 16," 187-188).

³⁶ Fretheim, *NIB* 1:444.

³⁷ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 6; and de Vaux, 53.

³⁸ Exum, "Mother in Israel," 77; and Frymer-Kensky, "Sarah1/Sarai," 151.

J. Cheryl Exum notes that Sarah acts to guarantee *her* position. She entreats Abraham to drive away Hagar because Hagar could become the mother of Israel instead of Sarah.³⁹ While the text clearly states that Sarah is distraught over Ishmael sharing in Isaac's inheritance and not Hagar usurping Sarah's position, it is very clear that Sarah again retains her position as not only Abraham's primary wife but also the mother of a nation and kings (Gen 17:16). Sarah's actions ensure the security of her position and the succession of her biological son.

Another function the use of *gēbîrâ* has in the narrative is to justify Sarah's actions. The text insinuates that Sarah's treatment of Hagar is harsh and Abraham is not in agreement with sending Ishmael and Hagar into the wilderness. When Sarah treats Hagar in such a way as to lower her status, she is reasserting herself as *gēbîrâ*, the first lady of the household of Abraham. When she compels Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, she acts as a queen mother in securing the succession of her son by removing the threat of sons from secondary "wives" and removing those "wives" to ensure her place as the primary lady of the "court." By placing the appellation of *gēbîrâ* upon Sarah with the acts of the queen mothers in mind, Sarah has acted in accordance with what is expected of her and the narrator justifies her actions in securing her place and her son's inheritance.

Once Sarah secures her son's inheritance and her own position as the first lady of Abraham's household, she disappears from Genesis until her death. The Hebrew Bible, however, continues to acknowledge Sarah's preeminent position. One can see her high status as mother to ancient Israel in the broader narrative of Scripture in Isa 51:2, which

³⁹ Exum, "Mother in Israel," 76.

states that Sarah gave birth to the nation as the narrator calls upon the people to look to her and Abraham.

Conclusion

Sarah is more than a mistress as she acts in the manner of the queen mothers. Sarah secures her position as the primary wife of Abraham after Hagar becomes pregnant and after the birth of Ishmael and her own son. She not only ensures her place as the *gěbîrâ*, she also guarantees her son's inheritance and succession as the son of the divine promise by removing the threat of Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn. By using *gěbîrâ* in Gen 16, the narrator foreshadows Sarah as the chosen matriarch who will carry the promised heir and justifies her actions that secure the succession of her son Isaac. The text considers Sarah the preeminent matriarch, a woman of the highest status, such as the queen mother held. If Abraham is the father of the child, then Sarah is the mother, but she is more—she is the queen mother, as opposed to Hagar, who is mother/wife in the “harem.”

Bathsheba: The Queen Mother Who Secures the Nation

The first official queen mother of the monarchy is Bathsheba, widow of Uriah, wife of David, and mother of Solomon. Bathsheba is probably most well-known for David's affair with her (2 Sam 11-12). There, she is a passive figure, who must submit to all the key players in the incident, even watching her child die for David's sins. As the queen mother-in-transition and the queen mother under Solomon, she is a far more active character. She helps to effect Solomon's succession, ensuring her status as the queen mother (1 Kgs 1:11-22), and also has the privilege of crowning Solomon upon his

accession (Song 3:11). She serves as a counselor to Solomon, which, in one particular instance, helps secure his throne by setting the stage to rid him of his main rival (1 Kgs 2:13-24). Last, in her role as counselor, Solomon the king bowed to her and set a throne for her on his right hand (1 Kgs 2:19), signs of respect and authority.

Becoming the Queen Mother

As David's health is waning (1 Kgs 1:1), Adonijah, son of Haggith, steps forward and declares himself as king, to which David does not question (1 Kgs 1:5-6). As the oldest surviving son of David, Adonijah is the crown prince, following the principle of primogeniture. The monarchy, however, has not yet established a true procedure for determining succession. Samuel anointed both Saul and David as king. No prophet had come forward to anoint another king.⁴⁰ Adonijah, therefore, assumes primogeniture as Amnon, David's first son is dead; Chileab, the second son, has disappeared from the narrative with the reader's assumption that he is dead; and Absalom, the third son, is also dead. Even in his old age, David has not settled the case of succession before his sons and the public, which allows Adonijah to make the assumption that he will become king next.

Nathan approaches Bathsheba regarding Adonijah's actions and insists she petition David in order to save her life and Solomon's (1 Kgs 1:13). Nathan specifically states that Bathsheba's life is at stake as well; her position within the court is in danger if she is not the queen mother as the position would go to Haggith under Adonijah. This

⁴⁰ Gene Rice, *Nations Under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings* (ITC; ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 7.

need to secure Solomon's succession is more than rivalry, as some scholars suggest.⁴¹

Yes, she would lose the most powerful position accorded to a woman in the kingdom, but she would have no court standing and possibly be killed if Adonijah seeks to destroy any competition to his throne.

While Adonijah may not intend to kill them, other kings remove all threats to their place as king; so, it is a plausible possibility as the situation is a tense one.⁴² There appears already to be tension between Adonijah's followers and Solomon's followers with both probably expecting some type of hostile confrontation. This apprehension is evident in Adonijah gathering fifty soldiers around him for the coronation (1 Kgs 1:5-6) and refusing to invite Solomon and his followers (1 Kgs 1:9-10), Nathan's fear for the lives of the royal family (1 Kgs 1:12), and Solomon's violent reaction toward this opposing faction after his succession (1 Kgs 1:13-46).⁴³

Adonijah may indeed eliminate his opponents as Solomon does.⁴⁴ Bathsheba and Nathan certainly think so. When Bathsheba makes her petition, she states that when David dies, she and Solomon will be "sinners" (חַטָּאִים), for which "offenders" may serve as a better translation. These offenders are the enemies of the new king, which

⁴¹ For example, see Rice, *Nations Under God*, 11.

⁴² Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 56.

⁴³ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 189; see also, Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 56.

⁴⁴ Claudia V. Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 105; and Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSup 320; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 163.

automatically places their lives in danger.⁴⁵ When David proclaims Solomon as king, Adonijah and his party tremble and flee (1 Kgs 1:49). Adonijah is so terrified that he seeks sanctuary in the Temple (1 Kgs 1:50). Just as Adonijah makes no claims to kill Solomon and his party, Solomon makes no such statements but Adonijah and his followers assume he will kill them. Walter Brueggemann writes: “Nobody among the losers is safe! It is as though all parties accept that their lives will be exterminated if they do not prevail. This story turns upon the near threat of violence.”⁴⁶ Bathsheba’s fear is justified indeed and she does not exaggerate when she petitions David to proclaim Solomon as king, for an otherwise scenario guarantees their deaths as they may potentially usurp the throne and the position of queen mother.⁴⁷

When Bathsheba goes into David to make her request, she expands the lines Nathan gave her with “the most persuasive inventiveness.”⁴⁸ Her rhetoric is more assertive, forceful, and vigorous than Nathan suggested.⁴⁹ Terence E. Fretheim describes her as clever in her persuasion, especially when she introduces “God language” to remind

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; ed. R. Scott Nash; Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2000), 15; and Irntraud Fischer, “Salomo und die Frauen,” in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie des Alten, Ersten Testaments: Festschrift für Erich Zenger* (ed. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger; Herders biblische Studien 44; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 222.

⁴⁶ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 22

⁴⁷ Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 156; Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (AB 10; ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 159-160; and Rice, *Nations Under God*, 12.

⁴⁸ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 98.

⁴⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Westminster Bible Companion; ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 24; Lillian R. Klein, “Bathsheba Revealed,” in *Samuel and Kings: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 59; and Rice, *Nations Under God*, 11.

David that he swore an oath to Yahweh that Solomon would be his heir.⁵⁰ By using Nathan's words as an outline, she intellectually argues for Solomon's succession because of David's supposed oath, the potential for her death and Solomon's, and because the unity of the country is at stake (1 Kgs 1:20). Volkmar Fritz writes: "The speech is extremely sophisticated, since it leaves the king no choice but to side with Solomon and to take actions toward his enthronement."⁵¹ Her words are so persuasive that Nathan even reuses them when he comes in to David's chamber to support her claims and petition.⁵² If Nathan could have swayed David alone, he would not have entreated Bathsheba to petition David for Solomon's appointment; therefore, she is crucial in determining the royal succession.⁵³

It is important to note here that this claim of Nathan's and Bathsheba's is putative. The text has not previously narrated this oath. Many scholars, therefore, argue that Nathan and Bathsheba invented the oath to save their positions at court.⁵⁴ Nathan and Bathsheba, then, are conspiring to implant the idea in David's mind that he swore an oath before God. Nathan needs to support her words as verification to David that her claims

⁵⁰ Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 24.

⁵¹ Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings* (CC; trans. Anselm Hagedorn; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 20.

⁵² Klein, "Bathsheba Revealed," 61. Klein adds: "We must keep in mind that this is a high-ranking male prophet using—following—the words of a woman."

⁵³ Joe E. Lunceford suggests that Nathan enlists Bathsheba because she is possibly the power behind the throne at this time with an ailing and aging David at the helm (*Biblical Women—Submissive?* [Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009], 67).

⁵⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 98; Fischer, "Salomo und die Frauen," 220-1; Klein, "Bathsheba Revealed," 59; Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 178; Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 64; Anthony Phillips, *David: A Story of Passion and Tragedy* (London: SPCK, 2008), 166; and Choon-Leong Seow, *NIB* 3:19.

are indeed “true.”⁵⁵ Such an oath would be vastly important to the tradition of the Davidic dynasty. Even if the oath was made only before Bathsheba, the fact that Nathan knows of it is strange. Nathan does not acknowledge before David that he is aware of the oath and only questions if David designated Adonijah as his heir. He would not need to ask the question if he was present for the oath.⁵⁶ From this perspective, Bathsheba is even cleverer in interfering in the succession of her son as she “shows herself to be very shrewd and capable at getting David to do what she wants.”⁵⁷ She has the intellect to understand Nathan’s plot and how to proceed flawlessly in the conspiracy.

The narrator, however, does not acknowledge a plot or conspiracy on behalf of Nathan and Bathsheba. While the text describes David as impotent, it does not describe him as confused or anything not of sound mind.⁵⁸ The text shows Solomon to be God’s chosen for succession, one whom Yahweh loves (2 Sam 12:24; 1 Kgs 6:11-14).

Adonijah acknowledges Solomon as the one of whom God approves for the throne (1 Kgs 2:15). So, even if Nathan conspires to convince David who did not swear an oath to name Solomon as his heir, the text presents God as implicitly supporting this claim. This heir of David’s will build a house for Yahweh, which Solomon does.⁵⁹ Bathsheba, therefore, is ensuring that the one beloved of God will indeed inherit the throne.

⁵⁵ Phillips, *David: A Story of Passion and Tragedy*, 166.

⁵⁶ Mignon R. Jacobs, “Mothering a Leader: Bathsheba’s Relational and Functional Identities,” in *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest: Biblical Mothers and Their Children* (ed. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Tina Pippin; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 77; and Seow, *NIB* 3:19.

⁵⁷ McKenzie, *King David*, 181; see also, Jacobs, “Mothering a Leader,” 79.

⁵⁸ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; ed. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 88.

⁵⁹ Paul Borgman, *David, Saul, and God: Rediscovering an Ancient Story* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 137.

The Queen Mother Who Crowns

The privilege of crowning Solomon even goes to Bathsheba according to Song of Songs 3:11. This act of crowning him may mean that she literally placed the crown on his head at his coronation or the phrase may reference her securing his succession.⁶⁰ Bronner notes that the former king, if alive, would crown his son,⁶¹ but Tremper Longman III notes that the narrator's choice of Solomon's mother may possibly be due to her essential role throughout the entirety of Song of Songs.⁶² Even if the choice of Bathsheba is poetic, the privilege still belongs to the queen mother and not David or priest or prophet.

The Queen Mother Advocate

Not long after Solomon's succession, the narrative depicts Bathsheba as a counselor to her son. Adonijah approaches Bathsheba with a request that he apparently

⁶⁰ Susan Ackerman hints at this symbolic meaning (*Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 136). Several authors disagree that Bathsheba's crowning of Solomon refers to his royal coronation and that the crown is merely a wedding garland or a celebratory crowning for his wedding (for example, see Fischer, "Salomo und die Frauen," 223; Daniel Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs* [Apollos Old Testament Commentary 16; ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham; Nottingham: Apollos, 2010], 340, 345; and Duane A. Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs/Lamentations* [WBC 23B; ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004], 181). Exum, Longman, and Murphy do not determine if the crown is for his official coronation or a wedding diadem because the text does not make it clear. All three scholars note that the practice of the queen mother crowning her son at his coronation is unknown but the tradition of the queen mother crowning her son for his wedding is also unknown. Scholars should rule out neither possibility or consider that the description is poetic invention (Exum, "Mother in Israel," 150; Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* [NICOT; ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001], 139; and Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs* [ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 152). Garrett and House note that even if the crown is simply a wedding garland, "the fact that it is on Solomon's head gives it royal status" (*Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 181).

⁶¹ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 52.

⁶² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 139 n 50. Longman notes the absence of the father in Song of Songs.

cannot broach with Solomon directly (1 Kgs 2:13-18).⁶³ Adonijah's request appears so simple: as consolation, he would like as his wife Abishag, the young woman who was meant to inflame David's passion. Abishag is now a part of Solomon's harem as he received all of David's wives and concubines as his own. Bathsheba, as the queen mother, was more than likely in charge of the harem and, therefore, had authority second only to the king over the women.⁶⁴

Bathsheba must have considerable influence at court for Adonijah to approach her regarding something as important as the harem. The narrative even depicts her as a courtier to Solomon, according to Susan Ackerman.⁶⁵ When she appears before Solomon in the throne room, he states that he will not refuse a request of hers (1 Kgs 2:20); "(a)s if to regard her wishes and good insight as tantamount to his own, he promises to grant her request before she even makes it known."⁶⁶ Coupled with Solomon admitting no refusal of her requests and the authority vested to her by her throne at his right hand (see below), she probably served as a counselor to Solomon, particularly in political and judicial affairs at court.⁶⁷

Solomon reacts violently to the request, sentencing Adonijah to death for the petition. There is still great tension between Solomon's court and Adonijah. Bathsheba must ask Adonijah if he comes to her in peace (1 Kgs 2:13) and she responds to him with

⁶³ Seow, *NIB* 3:31. Seow calls the request "delicate and audacious."

⁶⁴ Camp, "1 and 2 Kings," 106; Beverly W. Cushman, "Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," *JSOT* 30, 3 (2006): 339; Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 37; and House, *1, 2 Kings*, 100.

⁶⁵ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137

⁶⁶ Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings* (AOTC; ed. Patrick D. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 28

⁶⁷ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 189; and Camp, "1 and 2 Kings," 106.

abrupt answers.⁶⁸ There is much more to Adonijah's request than to take the beautiful woman Abishag as his wife. Solomon interprets the request as Adonijah attempting to lay claim to the kingship. Given that the harem is a sign of kingship and that a king appropriates the former king's harem upon succession (see 2 Sam 3:7-10, 12:8, and 16:20-22), the transfer of Abishag from Solomon to Adonijah would indicate the older brother's intent upon the throne. Solomon suddenly changes from a doting son who takes his mother's word seriously to a violent exacter of punishment.⁶⁹

Is Bathsheba, therefore, stupid or naïve with regards to court protocol or crafty for bringing to light Adonijah's intentions upon the throne?⁷⁰ Bathsheba may see no harm in granting the request of one woman with whom David never had intercourse;⁷¹ she may be glad to be rid of the woman who rivaled her for David's affections and may even compete with her for Solomon's affections;⁷² or she might believe it best for Solomon's success if he shows favors to Adonijah and the losing party.⁷³ Nothing in the text supports the theory that she was stupid or naïve.

⁶⁸ Fischer, "Salomo und die Frauen," 225; Jacobs, "Mothering a Leader," 80; Sakenfield, *Just Wives*, 76; and Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 68.

⁶⁹ Rice, *Nations Under God*, 23.

⁷⁰ Jacobs, "Mothering a Leader," 80-81; Lunceford, *Biblical Women—Submissive?*, 67-8; Phillips, *David: A Story of Passion and Tragedy*, 171-172; and Sakenfield, *Just Wives*, 77. One could ask the same of Adonijah—is he stupid as well? He may have truly hoped that Solomon would grant his request without believing in ulterior motives. He may have only hoped to bring himself back into the good graces of the house of David. Also, he may be guilty of what Solomon accuses him—designs on the throne (Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, 27).

⁷¹ Seow, *NIB* 3:32.

⁷² Adele Berlin, "Bathsheba," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament* (ed. Carol Meyers; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 58; and Camp, "1 & 2 Kings," 106.

⁷³ Andreasen, "The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," 189. Andreasen argues that Bathsheba was not naïve about royal protocol and questioned Adonijah about his intentions. Feeling assured of his sincerity for Abishag, she agreed to bring the petition before Solomon.

Her use of the adjective “small” to describe her request (1 Kgs 2:20) may shed light on her intentions. Either she is trying to downplay the nature of the request or she is speaking ironically in such a tone that will guarantee Solomon understands her intent, which is for him to kill Adonijah.⁷⁴ I contend that she knew what the result would be when she brought the request before Solomon. As the woman in charge of the harem, she would understand court politics with regards to the former and current kings’ wives and concubines.⁷⁵ She does not affirm Adonijah’s request nor does she deny him.⁷⁶ Her words read more as if she has discovered his intentions and her response is doublespeak: “So, this is the lot you have chosen [to be a usurper]. Very well, I will let Solomon know about *you*.” Her political maneuvering guarantees the removal of the last remaining man with a legitimate claim to Solomon’s throne. While Adonijah had extracted an oath from Solomon previously not to harm him as long as he does not act wickedly, Bathsheba hands Solomon an excuse to be rid of his older brother and rival. She exposes Adonijah as a threat and acts wisely in order to secure Solomon’s reign.⁷⁷

The Enthroned Queen Mother

When Bathsheba comes before Solomon to speak with him about Adonijah, Solomon bows to her and has a throne placed to the right of his throne (1 Kgs 2:19). Court etiquette dictates that the king remain seated when a person enters the throne room or the room that serves as the place of audience. In this verse, Solomon rises to meet her

⁷⁴ Klein, “Bathsheba Revealed,” 63.

⁷⁵ House, *1, 2 Kings*, 100.

⁷⁶ Fischer, “Salomo und die Frauen,” 225.

⁷⁷ Ben-Barak, “The Queen Consort and the Struggle for Succession to the Throne,” 97; Berlin, “Bathsheba,” 58; Jacobs, “Mothering a Leader,” 80-81; and Robert I. Vasholz, “The Wisdom of Bathsheba in 1 Kings 2:13-25,” *Presb* 33, 1 (Spr 2007): 49.

and bows to her when it should be her bowing to him out of deference to the king.⁷⁸

After he sits on his own throne, he brings one for her. Some translations belittle this importance and authority of Bathsheba in translating כִּסֵּא as “seat” (e.g., NJB and KJV).

The text uses the same word for Solomon’s throne as for Bathsheba’s.

Also, Solomon places the throne to his right. The right hand was symbolic of honor, power, and authority.⁷⁹ Bathsheba sitting at his right hand symbolically shows that Solomon has given her delegated authority and she can implement his power.⁸⁰

Psalms 80:18 and 110:1 describe the king sitting at the right hand of God. Ackerman suggests that “after the throne of the monarch himself, the chair assigned to Bathsheba is the place of highest honor on the royal dais.”⁸¹ Edward Sri takes this supposition further

and suggests that this scene proves she holds the second most important position in the monarchy, the king being first.⁸² John H. Otwell nicely sums up the import of the verse:

“He rose from his throne (the symbol of his royal power), bowed before her (an act of homage throughout the ancient Near East), and had her seated on his right (the position of honor).”⁸³ Solomon’s greeting and positioning of Bathsheba is more than honor and

⁷⁸ Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington, *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings, vol. 1* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2008), 80. Bathsheba bowed to David when she came before him to secure Solomon’s succession (1 Kgs 1:16, 31). As the wife of the king, she bowed to the king, but as the queen mother, the king bowed to her.

⁷⁹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137; DeVries, *1 Kings*, 38; Lunceford *Biblical Women—Submissive?*, 68; Martin Noth, *Könige* (BKAT 9; ed. Martin Noth and Hans Walter Wolff; Neukirchener Verlag: Des Erziehungsvereins Newukirchen-Vluy, 1968), 33; Omanson, *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings*, 1:80; Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 90; and Edward Sri, *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary’s Queenship* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2005), 51.

⁸⁰ DeVries, *1 Kings*, 38; and Lunceford, *Biblical Women—Submissive?* 80.

⁸¹ Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 137

⁸² Sri, *Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary’s Queenship*, 51.

⁸³ Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 90.

respect as it also holds an element of royal ceremony.⁸⁴ The king “treats her as almost an equal.”⁸⁵

An interesting phrase appears in this verse as well. Solomon has a throne brought for “the mother of the king.” The regnal formulas use this phrase when listing the names of the king’s mother. Rather than the text using “his mother,” “Solomon’s mother,” or “Bathsheba,” the text links Bathsheba to all the subsequent Judean queen mothers, according her the same position as these women. The usage of “the mother of the king” here and in the formulas suggests that the phrase is a title, which “reinforces the formality of the scene and probably expresses the viewpoint of others who are present.”⁸⁶ The text does not describe other queen mothers as receiving the same treatment from their sons, but the text here certainly awards Bathsheba honor, respect, and authority.

Conclusion

Bathsheba plays an instrumental role in securing God’s designs for ancient Israel. She craftily petitions David to name her son Solomon as king and, once he is king, she serves him as a counselor. In her position, he accords her great honor and authority. Also in this capacity, she helps to secure his throne through exposing Solomon’s chief rival Adonijah and giving him justification for killing the potential usurper. Robert L. Cohn writes: “Bathsheba’s well conceived strategies with both David and Solomon

⁸⁴ Herbert Donner, “Art und Herkunft des Amtes der Königinmutter im Alten Testament,” in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich zum 65. Geburtstag am 27. August 1958 gewidmet* (ed. Richard von Kienle et al; Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1959), 110; D. Rudolf Kittel, *Die Bücher der Könige* (HKAT; ed. D. W. Nowack; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), 18; and Noth, *Könige*, 33-34.

⁸⁵ Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings* (Berit Olam; ed. David W. Cotter; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), 52.

⁸⁶ Walsh, *1 Kings*, 52. Bowen uses this phrase to prove that the court accorded queen mothers respect and honor because they were the mother of the king and not the *gēbîrâ* (“The Quest for the Historical *Gēbîrâ*,” 606). See chapter two for my argument that each queen mother is a *gēbîrâ*. If a Judean queen mother is a *gēbîrâ* and 1 Kgs 2:19 calls Bathsheba “the mother of the king,” then she too is a *gēbîrâ*.

succeed in winning the kingship for Solomon.”⁸⁷ In essence, she helps to secure the nation as she persuades David to put an end to the rivalry for his throne and ensures that the one beloved of God, Solomon, who will build a house for Yahweh, inherits and keeps the throne.

The Mother of King Lemuel: The Counseling Queen Mother

Proverbs 31:1-9 records the words of King Lemuel of Massa, which his mother taught him. She calls him the son of her womb and of her vows and exhorts him to resist the strength of women and the ways of those who destroy kings. She warns him against strong drink and tells him to give that drink to those who are perishing and in bitter distress. He is to stay away from wine because he will forget the decrees that give rights to the afflicted. The king is to speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves and for the rights of the destitute. He is to demonstrate righteousness in judging the poor and needy. She articulates the view that justice is the true purpose of the monarch’s power and wealth instead of using it for women and wine.⁸⁸

Wisdom’s Royal Feminine Archetype

The provenance of the passage is difficult to determine since no record exists of King Lemuel in ancient Israelite history. “Lemuel” (לְמוֹאֵל) literally means “towards (*lemo*) God (‘*el*)” and scholars often translate it as “belonging to God” or “dedicated to

⁸⁷ Robert L. Cohn, “Characterization in Kings,” in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 95-96. See also, Andreasen, “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society,” 189-190.

⁸⁸ Milton P. Horne, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; ed. R. Scott Nash; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 359.

God” (see Prov 31:2 in which the mother calls him the son of her vows).⁸⁹ Depending upon how one translates מַסָּא, which can arguably be either “Massa” (a region in northern Arabia) or “oracle,”⁹⁰ לְמוֹעֵל is “Lemuel” of Massa or an oracle to “the one belonging to God” by his mother. Despite the inability to make a definite determination, the passage fits the important genre of instructional manuals for kings and princes.

Proverbs 31:1-9 is an example of manuals of instructions for kings and princes that are well known around the ancient Near East, particularly resembling Egyptian and Babylonian wisdom literature, which also attempts to instruct kings to fulfill their duties wisely and justly.⁹¹ These types of instructions are usually addressed to the crown prince

⁸⁹ Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers*, 52; and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* (NICOT; edited by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr.; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 503.

⁹⁰ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, *NIB* 5:258; Kathleen A. Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (ITC; ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 122; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 245; and Christine Roy Yoder, *Proverbs* (AOTC; ed. Patrick D. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 290. Horne argues that מַסָּא should be translated as “burden” or “oracle” rather than the identification of the location in Gen 25:14 (*Proverbs-Ecclesiastes*, 358). Clifford points out that it is only the vowel pointing that differentiates the two options but that when the text introduces a king, it normally gives the name of his country. One should read the word, therefore, as Massa, which is a North Arabian tribe appearing in Assyrian sources as *Mas’ania* (*Proverbs: A Commentary* [OTL; ed. James L. Mays et al; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 269; see also, Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* [IBC; ed. James L. Mays; Louisville: John Knox, 2000], 269). McKane also argues that מַסָּא is the location of Massa as the passage here is different from prophetic oracles where מַסָּא means “oracle.” The oracle formula, “Thus says Yahweh,” is also missing (*Proverbs: A New Approach* [OTL; ed. Peter Ackroyd et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], 408). Crenshaw suggests that one should translate מַסָּא as the region as מַלְכָּא, “king”, lacks an article in the verse and should then be associated with Massa (“A Mother’s Instructions to Her Son [Proverbs 31:1-9],” *Perspectives on the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Walter J. Harrelson* [ed. James L. Crenshaw; Macon: Mercer University, 1988], 14-15).

Ferdinand Deist dismisses the translation that these words are from Lemuel’s mother. Because the Hebrew syntax is odd here, he suggests that the superscription should read: “The words of Lemuel, the king of Massa, whose mother instructed him.” The person whom he is instructing is his own son (“Prov. 31:1. A Case of Constant Mistranslation,” *JNSL* 6 [1978]: 1-3). Michael V. Fox responds: “What would be the point of adding the biographical detail that Lemuel’s mother instructed him, then not citing her teachings? Furthermore, Lemuel’s son is not mentioned” (*Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 18B; ed. John J. Collins; New Haven: Yale University, 2009], 884).

⁹¹ Crenshaw, “A Mother’s Instructions to Her Son,” 9-22; McKane, *Proverbs*, 407; Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 503; and Yoder, *Proverbs*, 289.

by the reigning king or his vizier, particularly at a time of transition or during a rite of passage. For this pericope, it is probably at the time of his coronation.⁹² Leo G. Perdue writes:

(I)t is not infrequently the case that there are royal instructions issued to kings newly installed or in the process of assuming the throne as a part of the rites of passage. It is during these occasions that the young ruler is most open to instruction and is thus provided guidance on the proper conduct befitting a king.⁹³

This one, however, is unique in that no other mother addresses her son the king or prince in royal instructions in ancient Near Eastern literature though queen mothers influenced the policies and theological stances of the kings.⁹⁴

The queen mother of this passage uses direct address and familial terms (“my son,” v 2) in a similar manner to the male sages. She proffers direct admonitions and prohibitions and uses imperatives that show she has the authority to deliver such advice and expects her son to obey her words (vv 3, 6, 8, 9). The instructions of this genre usually deal primarily with subjects necessary for a prince or king to be successful in the royal court and professional circles. The typical themes are table manners, professionalism, and warnings against the charm of women. Like the normative themes of the male sages, the queen mother emphasizes the social responsibilities of the king,⁹⁵

⁹² Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Westminster Bible Companion; ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 149; and Perdue, *Proverbs*, 270-271. Perdue suggests that this teaching is from about the eighth or seventh century B.C.E. that was considered a standard for young rulers, particularly in the house of David, to study and to act upon before and when they came to the throne (*Proverbs*, 274).

⁹³ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 270; see also Yoder, *Proverbs*, 289.

⁹⁴ Andreasen, “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society,” 192; Van Leeuwen, *NIB* 5:257; and Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 503. See the section on ancient Near Eastern queen mothers in chapter two for specific examples of the mother of the king influencing politics.

⁹⁵ Roland Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 241.

warning against drunkenness and women (vv 3-5) and offering advice in regards to the traditional protective tasks charged to the kings (vv 8-9). The queen mother transforms the traditional warnings to kings into an exhortation to practice justice and offers “wit and (a) light touch (that) might render benevolent a king who would otherwise be offended by criticism.”⁹⁶

The mother in the second half of the standard antithetical word-pair (father/mother) is an instructional device the writers of wisdom literature used in their discourses on parental prudence, responsibilities, and control. Carole Fontaine writes: “The mother is the epitome of power and influence expressly because she *is* a mother.”⁹⁷ Because the mother is the initial instructor of her children and domestic staff, she is to pay particular attention to “proper behavior in order to secure the success of her offspring. The outcome of child-rearing reflects directly upon her performance.”⁹⁸

The Counselor’s Wise Advice

This passage of vocational advice focuses upon what behavior makes a king righteous. The queen mother does not advise that her son make a name for himself, amass wealth or land, or raise monuments to his prowess. She expresses the belief that the king and his position are founded upon righteousness.⁹⁹ The king is the representative of Yahweh on earth and God ultimately will judge him by the same

⁹⁶ Clifford, *Proverbs*, 271.

⁹⁷ Carole Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (JSOTSup 356; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 27. See also Camp, *Wisdom and The Feminine*, 82; and Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed*, 97-8.

⁹⁸ Fontaine, *Smooth Words*, 27.

⁹⁹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 246.

standard that God is judged, “namely, the demonstration of protective love for the weakest members of society.”¹⁰⁰

As the earthly counterpart to Yahweh, the king, above all else, must protect those who are powerless, those who are impoverished.¹⁰¹ Lemuel, therefore, should uphold laws and pass judgments that protect the poor. These people are the subjects of his monarchy who do not have a voice. They cannot speak for themselves and need an advocate for their voice; the king, therefore, must speak for them. Christine Roy Yoder writes: “(The poor) depend on it, as does the longevity of his kingdom.”¹⁰² Order and justice are the foundation for society and enable “the community to live in concert with cosmic righteousness, the force used by God in creating and maintaining the world.”¹⁰³ Failure to maintain justice results in the punishment of the monarchy and its subject.

Conclusion

The characterization of mothers in instructional texts such as Prov 31:1-9 is that they are responsible for the advice given to their children and held accountable for their actions. A son’s success reflects directly upon his mother and her instruction. The mother of the king in this text exhorts her son not to succumb to the wiles of women and strong drink. Most importantly, he is to act with wisdom and treat those who are afflicted and the poor with justice; the king is to walk justly. James L. Crenshaw writes: “The tone of the advice to Lemuel suggests that his mother wished to instill in him a noble

¹⁰⁰ Davis: *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* 150.

¹⁰¹ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament; ed. Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2006), 539.

¹⁰² Yoder, *Proverbs*, 292.

¹⁰³ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 274.

concept of kingship so that responsibility rather than privilege would control his daily conduct.”¹⁰⁴ By this queen mother calling Lemuel a son of her vows (v 2), she insinuates that his inappropriate actions question *her* integrity before God.¹⁰⁵

The Mother of Belshazzar: A Wise, Foreign Queen Mother

In Dan 5, the Babylonian king Belshazzar hosts a great feast for one thousand people. While drunk, Belshazzar serves the feasters with the treasures of the Jerusalem Temple taken by Nebuchadnezzar, all the while praising their own gods (vv 2-4). A disembodied hand appears and writes a message on the wall (v 5). Belshazzar pales at the sight and his bowels loosen in fear (v 6). He calls for the wise men of Babylon to interpret the writing but none can (vv 7-8). The queen mother hears of the writing and his dilemma and enters the hall to offer advice (v 10). She lauds the role of Daniel under Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and commends him to Belshazzar as one who can unravel the mystery of the writing (v 11-12). The king calls for Daniel and the prophet delivers a scathing message sent from Yahweh (vv 26-28).

Who is the מַלְכָּה of Daniel 5:10?

There is much debate as to the identity of this woman in Dan 5:10. The text vests her with the term מַלְכָּה, which means “queen,” a term that suggests more than a mere consort. Several clues in the passage help to determine that this woman is the queen mother of Belshazzar and not his wife.¹⁰⁶ (1) The wives of the king are already present in

¹⁰⁴ Crenshaw, “A Mother’s Instructions to Her Son,” 19.

¹⁰⁵ Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* 149.

¹⁰⁶ For possible historical identifications of this woman, such as Nitocris and Adad-Guppi, see John A. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Dallas: Word, 1989),

the banquet (v 3). If she were the wife of a king, she would already be present for the mysterious event.¹⁰⁷ (2) The title for this woman is different than the wives of the king previously mentioned in v 3, indicating a different social station or position for her.¹⁰⁸ One would expect the use of *לַמַּלְכָּה* to identify her if she were the wife of Belshazzar.¹⁰⁹ (3) She describes Daniel's role during the reign of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar. Her extensive knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's policies, of which a younger wife of Belshazzar would not be aware, demonstrates her presence for those events.¹¹⁰ (4) She enters the banquet hall, with great confidence, unbidden by the king. A wife could not enter the presence of the king uninvited upon pain of death (see Esth 4:11).¹¹¹ (5) She addresses the king as a mother rather than a wife/consort, taking charge of the situation

109; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (NAC 18; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 159-160; W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel* (IBC; ed. James Luther Mays; Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 69-70; and H. J. M. Van Deventer, "Would the Actually 'Powerful' Please Stand? The Role of the Queen (Mother) in Daniel 5," *Scriptura* 70 (1999): 246.

¹⁰⁷ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; ed. D. J. Wiseman; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1978), 121; Joyce E. Winifred Every-Clayton, "Daniel," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002), 425; Danna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 146 n 11; Miller, *Daniel*, 159; and Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 140.

¹⁰⁸ Towner, *Daniel*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁹ Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), 184.

¹¹⁰ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 121; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 248; Every-Clayton, "Daniel," 425; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 146 n 11; Miller, *Daniel*, 160; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *NIB* 7:82; Towner, *Daniel*, 69-70; and Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 140.

¹¹¹ George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Daniel* (Mellen Biblical Commentary 25; ed. George Wesley Buchanan; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1999), 138; Miller, *Daniel*, 159; Towner, *Daniel*, 69-70; and Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 140. Collins notes that his mother takes the initiative in advising the king in the MT but, in the OG, the king calls for her because of the necessary permission to enter his presence (*Daniel*, 248).

and rebuking him before the festal revelers.¹¹² (6) Last, her social standing indicates her position. The king and the court accept and seem to expect her rebuke. A concubine or a consort would not have the status to rebuke the king.¹¹³ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher notes that the passage demonstrates the theme of the role and power of the queen mother, not the wife of the king, in the ancient Near East. In v 16, Belshazzar promises he will promote Daniel to be the third ruler of the kingdom. With the introduction of the queen mother here, the rank of “third” would appear to be behind the king and the queen mother.¹¹⁴

Ross S. Kraemer disagrees with the assumption that the woman in Dan 5:10 is the queen mother based on the above observations. Kraemer acknowledges that the text may indeed be referring to the queen mother. The same evidence, however, may point to a different reality. She writes: “(H)er absence from the banquet, and thus her implicit abstinence from the impious activity, align her with Daniel and remove any taint from her recommendation.”¹¹⁵ The above evidence, therefore, is about her introduction and role rather than her familial identification. I will proceed with the assumption that the queen is the queen mother and not a wife given the greater amount of evidence for that case.

¹¹² Buchanan, *The Book of Daniel*, 138; Every-Clayton, “Daniel,” 425; and Miller, *Daniel*, 159.

¹¹³ Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 146 n 11; and Van Deventer, “Would the Actually 'Powerful' Please Stand?,” 248.

¹¹⁴ Smith-Christopher, *NIB* 7:82.

¹¹⁵ Ross S. Kraemer, “Dan 5:10-12: Queen (of Babylon),” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books and the New Testament* (ed. Carol Meyers; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 342.

The Wise Queen Mother and the Wise Prophet

This passage depicts the queen mother as a wise woman despite her court affiliation. The text sets her over against the drunken revelers and a foreign king who desecrates the Jerusalem Temple's treasures. While all the attendees and the king himself panic over what they have witnessed, the queen mother has a plan. She does not wait for a messenger to come to her but takes charge of the situation over the king and any other counselors.

The queen mother is aware of Daniel and his previous high standing in Nebuchadnezzar's court and his great exploits. She acknowledges his wisdom and that this wisdom comes from God (v 11). She does not use Yahweh's name but knows that Daniel's wisdom comes from the divine, which appears to be separate from the deities that Belshazzar serves. Porteous writes: "(S)he describe(s) him as divinely inspired and credit(s) him with intelligence and wisdom such as only God can bestow."¹¹⁶

Joyce G. Baldwin interprets the queen mother's words as giving Belshazzar and his court hope in solving the dilemma.¹¹⁷ Indeed, it seems only the queen mother's suggestion of Daniel will "loosen the knot" of the riddle's interpretation (v 12). Otherwise, the court would remain in a terrified state that the Babylonian wise men cannot remedy (v 8). Belshazzar takes up this hope in offering Daniel the same reward promised to Babylonian wise men (vv 7, 16). On the other side, H. J. M. Van Deventer interprets the queen mother's words as a rebuke. She belittles an arrogant king who has

¹¹⁶ Norman W. Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary* (OTL; ed. G. Ernest Wright et al; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 80.

¹¹⁷ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 122.

soiled himself with fear (v 6).¹¹⁸ Brenner asks: “Is she given the gift of unhysterical counsel in order to highlight the stupidity of (Belshazzar) and his companions, who—to their shame—behave like stereotypic frightened women, and therefore need a woman’s wisdom to reorient them?”¹¹⁹ The queen mother indeed is wise in her reaction and her words for she knows of God’s wisdom imparted to Daniel, whom Belshazzar chose to ignore. With confidence, she directs the chaotic scene toward Yahweh’s prophet, who will then admonish the king for his evil deeds.

Conclusion

Belshazzar’s queen mother is unquestionably foreign. She is the mother of a Babylonian king and seen only in the Babylonian court. What makes her stand out in this foreign monarchy is her wisdom. When Yahweh sends a mysterious, yet chilling message, none of the wise men of Babylon can interpret the handwriting on the wall. Seemingly at a loss, the queen mother sweeps into the drunken revelry uninvited and takes Belshazzar to task for neglecting Daniel, the wise man that Nebuchadnezzar had put in charge of his enchanters and diviners. Daniel’s wisdom comes from the divine and it is to this man who has extraordinary insight, an instrument of Yahweh, that Belshazzar should turn.

¹¹⁸ Van Deventer, “Would the Actually ‘Powerful’ Please Stand?,” 247; see also Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 89. Van Deventer notes that the king, who is drunk, is surrounded by female consorts, which is reminiscent of those things that King Lemuel’s mother warns her son against.

¹¹⁹ Athalya Brenner, “Some Observations on the Figurations of Woman in Wisdom Literature,” in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (FCB 9; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 65.

Conclusion

Four queen mothers appear outside of the divided monarchy. These women are Sarah, who is a queen mother of the ancestral promise; Bathsheba, the first queen mother named for the united monarchy (1 Kgs 1-2); the mother of Lemuel, who imparts advice to her son the king (Prov 31:1-9); and the mother of Belshazzar, a woman who identifies divine wisdom in the Babylonian court (Dan 5:10-12). These women stand in stark contrast to the queen mothers of the divided monarchy, whom the text characterizes as “bad queen mothers” who participate in foreign cults, are politically powerful and aggressive to the point of being detrimental to their sons’ reigns, and in/directly responsible for the shedding of innocent blood.

Sarah is not a queen mother in the literal sense but the narrator does refer to her with the appellation *gēbîrâ* in Gen 16:4, 8, and 9. In Gen 16ff, she acts in the manner of queen mothers as she seeks to secure her and Abraham’s inheritance for her biological son, Isaac. With Isaac as the son of the ancestral promise, she becomes the queen mother of the promise and the mother of great nations and kings (Gen 17:16). Sarah ensures the proper succession of God’s promise to make Abraham’s descendants a great nation, of which she is an ancestral mother. Bathsheba is similar in that she also ensures the succession of the proper son, the one loved by God. She appeals to an aged David to name Solomon as his successor. Then, after he has become king, she gives Solomon justification to rid himself of his greatest rival, Adonijah.

Assuming Lemuel’s mother is foreign, the narrator reckons two *foreign* women as good. Lemuel’s mother demonstrates great royal wisdom. She warns him of inappropriate court manners and strongly advises her son to demonstrate righteousness,

especially by promoting justice for the people. When the Babylonian court trembles with fear and no answer can be sought for the handwriting on the wall, Belshazzar's mother advises her son to seek out Daniel, to whom God has imparted enough wisdom to discern the meaning of the evening's events. She acts as a conduit for God's words of warning and correction to the Babylonian king. The texts depict the mothers of Lemuel and Belshazzar as wise women. These *foreign* women have a greater sense of what it means to walk justly than those queen mothers who serve the northern and southern courts.

As previously discussed in the fourth chapter, the queen mothers of the divided monarchy are inherently evil. The text's depiction of them demonstrates a *mythos* that these women are wicked. If a queen mother serves a king of the southern or northern monarchies, the narrator portrays her as a "bad queen mother." This typecast finds its opposite in the queen mothers who serve in a court other than for the divided monarchy. These other women ensure the succession of a proper child which secures the nation, such as with Sarah and Bathsheba, and demonstrate great wisdom that demands justice and acknowledgement of the Divine, of the one true God, such as with the mothers of Lemuel and Belshazzar.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: The *Mythos* of the Wicked Queen Mother vs. the Good Queen Mother

The Hebrew Bible presents mothers as often involving themselves in the affairs of their sons, ranging from simplistic to complicated plans. Sarah interprets the actions of Ishmael, Hagar's son, as threatening her own son's inheritance and requests Abraham to send Ishmael away (Gen 21:9-11). Rebekah helps Jacob trick his father into blessing him rather than the firstborn Esau (Gen 27:1-29). Jochebed saves the savior of the future Israel when hiding her son, Moses, and then setting him adrift in a reed basket rather than allow his death (Exod 2:1-9). When Deborah, the judge, rises up against Sisera, Judg 5:7 refers to her as a "mother in Israel" for her actions. These mothers are a few mothers from only three books of the Hebrew Bible.

While these mothers are vastly instrumental in carrying on the Abrahamic promise or protecting Israel from military attacks, the Hebrew Bible systematically lists mothers in only one place—the regnal formulas of the kings of Judah. These formulas name fifteen women (two mothers are named twice) for nineteen kings. Such a high concentration of women's names, especially mothers, emphasizes the importance of such a list. While scholars have speculated widely on the roles of the queen mothers in general, the theories for the naming of the king's mother are sparse: importance in dynastic succession and determining the king's legitimacy (Anderson, Ben-Barak, Bronner, de Vaux), presence of the queen mother in the editor's sources (Bin-Nun, Ishida, Solvang), the queen mother's influence upon her son (Bowen, Solvang), and honor for annual rites of the ancestor cult (Na'aman). While these theories have some

merit, they fail to take into account the narrative presentation of the formulas and the queen mothers themselves who appear outside of these formulas (Bathsheba, Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, and Nehushta). This dissertation, therefore, sought to combine both the formulas and the narratives involving the queen mothers through a narrative-theological lens. The result is that the queen mothers hold a position of power within the royal court as the *gěbîrâ*, which makes them the most powerful women in the kingdom, but they act in the same manner as the kings who receive qualified or negative evaluations. Their place within the formulas, an overarching theological structure that lays the blame for the downfall of the nation at the feet of the kings, shows that the queen mothers too are at fault for the exile of the nation in their capacity as the preeminent women of the monarchy.

Overview

The following will provide an overview of the dissertation from chapters two through five. Chapter two established the viability of the position of the queen mother. Many of the surrounding nations and societies held the queen mother in high esteem, often granting her a position and power at court. Evidence exists of queen mothers from Assyria, Babylonia, Ebla, Egypt, Elam, Hattusa, Sidon, Sumer, and Ugarit wielding sanctioned power in their respective courts. While the roles are only similar to the equivalent role in the ancient Israelite monarchy, they serve to show legitimacy in such an official position. Considering, textually, that ancient Israel desires to be like the nations in setting a king over them (1 Sam 8:19-20), one may logically assume that the foreign foundation for the monarchy includes the royal court. The ancient Israelite court,

therefore, may have sanctioned the position of the queen mother upon the basis of modeling the court after their neighbors' courts.

After detailing the examples of queen mothers in ancient Israel's neighbors, I established the notion of an official position for the queen mother within the Israelite court. The *gēbîrâ* is the woman who functions as the foremost woman in the household, nation, or, in one example, the ancient Near East. The majority of the uses of *gēbîrâ* refer to the queen mother. The Hebrew Bible establishes the queen mother as the preeminent woman of Judah through the listing of the mother in the regnal formulas and such texts listing the queen mother as the second person exiled. The narrator establishes the position of *gēbîrâ* as a formal role through vesting three queen mothers with the title, from which a king may remove her (1 Kgs 15:13). If every queen mother is the foremost woman of the monarchy and the king can remove her from being the foremost woman as opposed to the status of mother, then the title of *gēbîrâ* imbues every mother of the king with a position that the royal court sanctions

Chapter three focused upon establishing the theodicy of the narrative of 1-2 Kings in order to demonstrate how the queen mothers function within that theological platform. The regnal formulas and the prophecy-fulfillment schema of the books of Kings consistently present the overarching theology of the narrative. Among many other functions, the formulas provide theological commentary on the reigns of the kings and, by extension, the nations of ancient Israel. Through these formulas, the narrator theologically evaluates the religious effectiveness and fidelity of each king, the central character responsible for keeping the covenant. These theological evaluations provide the lens through which the reader should view the historical events of the divided

monarchy. The vast majority of kings, northern and southern, fail with regard to covenant fidelity. Also, the narrator blames certain kings for other actions (for example, the murder of innocent people) for the downfall of the two nations as well (2 Kgs 21:16; 24:4). The prophecy-fulfillment schema then serves to demonstrate how and why Yahweh punished the ancient Israelites. As Deut 28:63 warns, Yahweh exiles the nations due to their infidelity to Yahweh. The prophecy-fulfillment pattern present in 1-2 Kings proves that God's word will come to pass and then propels history forward. The exile comes to pass due to the failure of the kings and the people with regards to observing the first commandment of the Decalogue.

The two structuring elements of the regnal formulas and prophecy-fulfillment patterns describe the failure of the kings to keep their covenantal obligations and the resulting exile at the hands of Yahweh. The formulas reinforce the fulfillment of the prophecy. The theological evaluation of the kings, the primary targets of the formulas, drives each account, leading up to the last king of Judah. The narrative effectively answers the question of why the exile came about—the lack of covenant fidelity by both the leaders of the nations and the people.

Chapter four turned the focus upon the queen mother and her place within the monarchy and considers five queen mothers—Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, Nehushta, and Hamutal. I addressed the queen mother's place in the regnal formulas and concluded her place of importance and high status within the royal court due to the editor(s)'s deliberate decision to include the queen mother in all but two regnal reports for Judah. The data reported about a king's reign informs the narrator's theological evaluation; therefore, the

listing of the queen mother feeds into this evaluation. The manner in which the king's mother reflects upon his evaluation is not apparent through a study of the formulas alone.

After I addressed the regnal formulas, I investigated each of the five queen mothers above and evaluated them according to Linda Shearing's six elements that constitute a wicked queen mother: "(1) non-Judean; (2) politically powerful; (3) aggressive; (4) connected with Asherah and/or Baal; (5) liabilities to their husbands and sons; and (6) responsible for the death of others."¹ While acknowledging all six elements, I focused on elements four, five, and six because being non-Judean, politically powerful, and aggressive do not alone make a queen mother wicked (for example, see Bathsheba, Lemuel's mother, and Belshazzar's mother). The combination of the latter three elements with the former three ensure a wicked queen mother for Judah.

Maacah factors into only one verse but she makes a large impact (1 Kgs 15:13). She is both the *gēbîrâ* for her son Abijam (1 Kgs 15:2) and her grandson Asa (1 Kgs 15:10). Her only narrated actions—she has an image for Asherah erected—ensure the end of her tenure when Asa removes her from being *gēbîrâ*. She is a liability to her son for her propagation of the Asherah. Her influence must end and Asa deposes her.

From Rev 2:20 throughout popular culture, Jezebel may be the most reviled woman from the Bible. While her name has become synonymous with "shameless hussy," the text presents a far different picture than what a "jezebel" means now. Jezebel's sins do not fit a standard dictionary's definition of a "jezebel" according to the books of Kings. Power and apostasy are her sins. She is a queen mother for the northern kingdom, unlike the other queen mothers, but receives the title of *gēbîrâ* (2 Kgs 10:13). As the wife of King Ahab, she wielded immense power by claiming the king's seal to

¹ Linda Shearing, "Queen," *ABD* 5:586.

murder a subject (Naboth) for the whim of Ahab (1 Kgs 21) and funding 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kgs 18:19). Her actions as a “queen” follow her as a queen mother because her murder of Naboth garners the deadly prophecy of the end of the house of Ahab, which includes Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:21-24). Her son, King Ahaziah, receives a negative evaluation for following in her ways. Her second son to become king, Jehoram, dies at the hands of Jehu, the usurper, for her previous actions. Jehu describes her as all that is wrong with the northern kingdom and seeks to eradicate Israel of everything related to Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:22). She dies an ignominious death, thrown from a window, trampled by horses, and then eaten by dogs (2 Kgs 9:33-35). Her death serves in the narrator’s reflection upon her as just punishment for her zealous worship of Baal and her murderous actions. She receives the harshest judgment of all members of the Omride dynasty.

Athaliah, educated in the court of Ahab and married to the Judean king Jehoram, becomes a wife of a ruler, the mother of a ruler, and a ruler herself. The text critiques her for her relationship to the house of Ahab (2 Kgs 8:18), for her wicked counseling of her son, Ahaziah (2 Chr 22:3-4), and for her association with the Baal cult (2 Kgs 11:18). More than anything, the narrator depicts her negatively for her attempted extermination of the house of David and the usurpation of the throne from her grandson. She receives no regnal formula, although she reigns for six years. Yet, her wickedness cannot continue and the high priest Jehoiada orders her assassination (2 Kgs 11:15). Her influence is thus eradicated just as she thought she had eradicated the heirs of her son.

Nehushta is the third and final queen mother to receive the title *gēbîrâ*. Second Kings demonstrates her importance in naming her as the second person in the kingdom

that Jehoiachin surrenders and the second person in two lists of exiles, each time behind Jehoiachin only (2 Kgs 24:12, 15; see also Jer 29:2). The narrative never acknowledges her actions but, whatever they may be, Jeremiah directs blame upon her and her son for the downfall of Judah and she receives the exact same punishment as the king (Jer 22:24-27). Yahweh strips the woman who wears a crown like the king from her rank and exiles her with her son (Jer 13:18), ending her influence within the royal court of Judah.

Last, Hamutal comes under the critique of Ezekiel. She is the subject of an allegorical lament that focuses upon her sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (Ezek 19:1-14). The metaphorical lioness raises her sons to devour people and destroy cities (Ezek 19:3, 6-7). Ezekiel indicts Hamutal, who placed her second son on the throne, for her teaching and includes her in the blame for their downfall. She has withered and no more kings will rule from her (Ezek 19:14).

These five queen mothers exhibit similar qualities as the kings whom the text portrays negatively or gives qualified approval. Maacah, Jezebel, and Athaliah participate in foreign cults or the narrator perceives them as supporting the foreign cult. Jezebel and Hamutal participate directly or indirectly in the murder of innocent people. Nehushta receives the blame along with her son the king for the nation's demise and Yahweh punishes her in the same manner as her son. If they were kings, they would most certainly receive a negative judgment from the narrator. Given their lofty and powerful position, combined with their place in the regnal formulas, the queen mothers of the Judean monarchy are also at fault as representatives of the royal court.

The fifth chapter focused on the queen mothers who appear outside of the divided monarchy: Sarah, Bathsheba, Lemuel's mother, and Belshazzar's mother. Sarah is not a

queen mother in the sense that she is the mother of a king. The text refers to her as a *gěbîrâ* (Gen 16:4, 8, 9) and she acts in a similar manner, that is, she secures her place as the preeminent female in her household while securing the succession and inheritance of her son, Isaac. The narrator's choice of the title *gěbîrâ* foreshadows that this woman will be the matriarch of the Abrahamic promise and her son will be the heir of the promise. Her actions against Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:10), therefore, are justified. She will be a mother to future kings and nations (Gen 17:16).

Bathsheba, the first queen mother of ancient Israel, plots with the prophet Nathan to convince David to announce the succession of her son Solomon, the beloved of Yahweh, as king (1 Kgs 1:11-27). After Solomon is crowned, possibly by Bathsheba herself (Song 3:11), she is one of his counselors (1 Kgs 2:19-20). Through that position, she receives Adonijah's request for the concubine Abishag and exposes Adonijah as a threat to the kingship (1 Kgs 2:22). Solomon has him executed for this treasonous request (1 Kgs 2:24-25). She, therefore, secures the nation twice, once for David and once for Solomon, and ensures the proper choice of Yahweh in Solomon's accession.

Proverbs 31:1-9 relates the words of King Lemuel's mother. She advises him how to be a proper king in his etiquette but also how to be a just and righteous king. She may be a foreign queen mother or an ancient Israelite queen mother. Whoever she is, her words of advice teach the precepts of a king who walks justly before God.

The mother of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, takes charge of a terrifying situation in which the Babylonian court and its festal visitors are struck nearly insensible (Dan 5:1-9). She enters the chaotic scene and advises the king on how to handle the mysterious writing on the wall. In her husband's court, Daniel was the chief of the wise men,

enchanters, and diviners (Dan 5:11). This man will unravel the mystery of the writing (Dan 5:12). The queen mother is confident that the divine wisdom imparted to Daniel will prevail and she herself shows wisdom in recognizing his abilities.

As opposed to the queen mothers of the divided monarchy, these four women behave in an approved manner. Sarah and Bathsheba ensure the succession of their divinely chosen children. Yahweh rewards Sarah with great respect by declaring she will be a mother of nations and kings. Bathsheba secures the nation that could be torn over Adonijah's actions under both David's and Solomon's reigns. The mother of Lemuel teaches her son to be a just and righteous king. Belshazzar's mother is a wise woman in recognizing the wisdom of a Yahwistic prophet.

Implications

Scholarship has mostly focused on the historical role of the queen mother. When scholars have read the passages regarding the queen mothers through a literary lens, they generally treat the passages individually rather than as a whole or in order to serve a more narrow ideological reading. The focus on the queen mother's place in the regnal formulas, again, centers on her historical place and very little on her place within the narrative's theology. The above study sought to combine the regnal formulas and the individual pericopes in which the queen mothers appear and evaluate them through a narrative-theological lens. No previous study has read both the formulas and the characterization of the queen mother with a narrative methodology or a theological lens.

This study reveals a perception regarding the queen mother in the Hebrew Bible. No matter her historical functions or if the court approved of those functions, the narrative presents her in a certain light. It acknowledges that she held an official position

as the *gēbîrâ* and that position held great political and cultic power and imbued her with a “certain dignity and special powers,” a position that was not based solely upon her bearing the king or her influence as a mother.² By virtue of being the *gēbîrâ*, the queen mother is the first lady of the nation, the most powerful female in the kingdom. Scholarship may dispute her particular historical function and nothing extant currently clears up the confusion.³ The text, on the other hand, presents the *gēbîrâ* as the second most powerful person in the nation based upon her listing in the formulas and texts such as 2 Kgs 24:8, 15; Jer 13:18; 22:24-27; and 29:2.

The queen mother could have used her power for good but, each time that she appears in the text, she acts like a wicked king. She abuses her position and is aggressive in the propagation of a foreign cult or the murder of innocent people. Maacah, Jezebel, Athaliah, and Nehushta are wicked queen mothers according to the books of Kings. When any queen mother of the divided monarchy appears outside of Kings, the text again depicts her as wicked. The repeated stories in 1-2 Chronicles do not depict her any differently. 2 Chronicles 24:7 declares Athaliah to be wicked. Jeremiah describes the queen mother’s fall from her lofty position and her subsequent punishment through exile. Ezekiel indicts a queen mother for her bloody teachings to her sons. While Jezebel is not a Judean queen mother and the remaining four are, Jezebel helps to show that a queen mother from the divided monarchy is inherently evil. The Judean queen mother’s official position, place in the formulas, and the unanimous depiction of her wicked ways show that she too is at fault for the demise of the nation. The queen mothers’ removal from

² Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 117.

³ Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (AB 10; ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 397-398.

their positions indicates a reflection upon their actions. The text describes deposal (Maacah and Nehushta), regicide (Jezebel and Athaliah), exile (Nehushta), and metaphorical withering away (Hamutal). The royal court, including both the king and the queen mother, brings the nation down. The *mythos* of the queen mother of the southern and northern kingdoms is that she is bad or wicked by virtue of serving a king who reigns in the divided monarchy.

The study of the queen mothers who reign in monarchies other than the divided kingdoms tells a much different tale. Their respective passages present these queen mothers as complete opposites. They are good and wise. When they interfere, it is on the behalf of the divinely chosen son or to impart wise or just advice. The *mythos* of the queen mother outside of the divided monarchy is that she can be a good queen mother, even when she is foreign. She does not act in ways that are detrimental to her son and, when her actions appear harsh, the narrator justifies her in her protection of her son's succession and/or inheritance.

That all queen mothers who are not from the divided monarchy are good reinforces the *mythos* of the wicked queen mother of the two kingdoms of ancient Israel. The mother of Lemuel serves as an example. Proverbs 31:1-9 has preserved the wisdom of King Lemuel's mother, which has been elevated to a type of paradigm. She offers practical advice to help him act justly in his doings—no strong wine or indulgence with women so that he may uphold the rights of the afflicted and then he must speak out for those who cannot and judge the poor and needy righteously. While Lemuel's mother holds up an idealistic picture of kingship, the ancient Israelite kings fail to enact this

“envisioned ideal.”⁴ Those queen mothers of the divided monarchy who counsel their sons (Jezebel, Athaliah, Nehushta, and Hamutal) “are not always viewed as positively as the mother in Prov 31, so it is clear that they must have exerted enough power over their sons to make them a target for negative comment by authors and editors.”⁵ Those negative comments focus on behavior that is detrimental to the kingdom whereas the other queen mothers are models of appropriate royal power and behavior.

By inclusion in the regnal formulas, the narrative indicts the queen mothers just as it indicts the kings. As the most powerful male in the kingdom is targeted for blame, so is the most powerful female. The theological perspective of the narrative declares the monarchy culpable for the punishment of the exile. The queen mother, as part of the monarchy, wields her power in such a negative and detrimental fashion that she too is at fault and must receive blame along with the king for the ruin of Judah.

Future Trajectories

The woman who bears the Judean king does not seem to warrant blame for the downfall of the Judean monarchy simply because she performed her God-given function of bearing children. The queen mother of the Judean monarchy who wields enormous power that can influence her son, the royal court, the national cult, and the people of the nation would serve as a much worthier target for her culpability in the exile of Judah. Did the narrator, however, judge the historical queen mother fairly? Was she acting within her expected bounds rather than the appropriate theological bounds of an exilic or

⁴ Kathleen A. Farmer, *Who Knows What is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (ITC; ed. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren and George A. F. Knight; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 123.

⁵ Carole Fontaine, *Smooth Words: Women, Proverbs and Performance in Biblical Wisdom* (JSOTSup 356; ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 62.

priestly author or editor? These questions begin to combine narrative and theological readings with historical criticism, a future avenue for the study of the queen mother.

Maacah serves as an excellent example for the above questions. Maacah's son, Asa, deposes her for her having a cultic image for or of Asherah made (1 Kgs 15:13). Worship of Asherah along with Yahweh appears to have been normative in the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries BCE.⁶ During this time, Asherah appears to have a sanctioned place in both popular religion and the royal/state cult. Susan Ackerman argues, however, that biblical and archeological evidence suggests that Asa's desire for Yahwistic worship only was not normative in Judah as the Asherah cult was normative among the populace.⁷ Gösta W. Ahlström notes that Asa's actions to carry out his purge of Asherah worship imply that this worship was a part of the royal cult.⁸ Ackerman and Mordechai Cogan both argue that Maacah was simply fulfilling her responsibility as the earthly counterpart of the goddess in the Judean court, which also included her representation of Yahweh's consort in order to legitimize the king as the son of Yahweh.⁹ It appears, then, that Maacah was a victim of Asa's reform, a reform possibly fabricated by the author(s) or editor(s). If the reform was not fabricated, the editor may have embellished her place within the reform and negatively characterized her in order to justify the exile of Judah through the supposed actions of the royal court. No matter

⁶ Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112 (Fall 1993): 390-391; Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Lund: Gleerup, 1963), 57; Cogan, *1 Kings*, 398; and Saul M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (SBLMS 34; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars, 1988), 9.

⁷ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 390.

⁸ Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*, 57.

⁹ Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," 400; Susan Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in the Ancient Near East," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today* (ed. Karen L. King; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 180; and Cogan, *1 Kings*, 398.

Maacah's true or historical actions, correct by the popular cultic rituals of the people of her time, she is inherently wicked due to her affiliation with the Judean court and that she is a queen mother of the divided monarchy.

Did the editor misremember the queen mother's functions or wrongly judge her, such as the case with Maacah performing the expectation of popular religion? Was Athaliah a ruler in her own right, upholding Judah's responsibilities in a treaty with the northern kingdom or simply serving as a strong, independent regent for her grandson, rather than the cruel, murderous grandmother as presented in the narrative? Is the misrepresentation of the queen mother, then, an intentional crafting of the narrative as theodicy? Instead, is it possible that the collective memory of ancient Israel affirms the *mythos* of the wicked queen mothers of the divided monarchy despite the popularly or royally sanctioned beliefs of a queen mother's role? The investigation of the historical queen mother demonstrates a disconnect between the narrative-theological critique of her actions. The historical queen mother and her narrative presentation are not the equivalent.

Cultural memory studies, a relatively recent branch of criticism in biblical methodology,¹⁰ uncovers this disconnect and the possible reasons for the misrepresentation or misremembering of the queen mother. According to Philip R.

¹⁰ For the most influential works on cultural memory, see the following: Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997); Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. Rodney Livingstone; Stanford: Stanford University, 2006); Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: Dartmouth, 1998); Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, eds., *Performing Memory in Biblical Narrative and Beyond* (The Bible in the Modern World 25; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009); Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 2003); Phillip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Ronald Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005); Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan, and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World* (London: T & T Clark, 2004); and Mark S. Smith, *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory and the Experience of the Divine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

Davies, who presents a clear, coherent introduction to this criticism, cultural memory recalls “stories about the past shared by people who affirm a common identity, and who use stories to reinforce that identity.”¹¹ In his introduction, Davies explains that scholars and historians must interpret raw data, which will not interpret itself. Even taking data and “turning them into facts” involves interpretation.¹² History, therefore, becomes the past imbued with *meaning*. This meaning comes from understanding events through narrative, which requires an organization of data into a sequence of meaning. Plot emerges, then, from this sequencing and focuses upon select events. The product is the perception that this manufactured story is the objective past.¹³

The result that is the product of story is “never innocent of point of view, plot, ideology, or cultural value.”¹⁴ Davies uses the siege of Masada in 73 CE as an example among many others. The Jewish zealots who died during the siege are freedom fighters and martyrs in Israel. Roman histories, however, remember them as “brigands, bandits, (and) terrorists.”¹⁵ Cultural memory criticism espouses the study of critical history, which scrutinizes social memory, uncovering where the biblical accounts are “factually wrong and exposing their biases.”¹⁶

¹¹ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 12.

¹² Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 9.

¹³ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 10.

¹⁴ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 11.

¹⁵ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 12. See also, Alan Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies 52; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12.

¹⁶ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 13. Kirk notes that cultural memory is not the same as social memory [“Social and Cultural Memory,” 1-2 n 1]. Social memory, which informs cultural memory, is the assembly of individual stories to form a corporate narrative for a group in order to establish identity (Kirk, “Social and Cultural Memory,” 1-6).

The focus of such studies with the queen mother in particular, a future trajectory of the results of this dissertation, is upon how the cultural memory of ancient Israel perceives the actions and role of the queen mother throughout the centuries and into the final stages of authorship and editing of the books in which she appears. The idea of a *mythos* is the perception of the queen mother of the divided monarchy as inherently wicked rather than solely a narrative presentation. The narrative not only presents her as wicked (or good if she is a queen mother of another monarchy) but also that the narrative is more than story or accurate historical representation as it is the result of cultural memory. What is remembered and related in Scripture is not the historical role of the mother of the king but the ideological perception of certain groups of ancient Israelites, accurate to them but not necessarily accurate with regard to history.

A close study of the queen mother from cultural memory studies presents the recalled memory and perception of a very specific set of people from ancient Israel's history. By uncovering the disconnect in Israel's cultural memory of the queen mother in the books of Kings, these studies then naturally extend to the culturally recalled perception of women in power in 1-2 Kings and then into the broadened category of women in general in 1-2 Kings. One may easily extend this expansion into the Deuteronomistic History (DH) as well—what of royal women, women in power, and women in general in the DH? Do they too fall into the disconnect between history and their narrative presentation? Do the authors/editors treat these other women in the same fashion as the queen mother? Such a study of the queen mother creates a foundation as a guide, a measuring stick against which one can compare cultural memory studies of other women in the DH.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

The Queen Mothers of Judah in the Regnal Formulas

| King | King's Mother | King's Evaluation | Regnal Formula |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Rehoboam | Naamah of Ammon | Negative | 1 Kgs 14:21-22 |
| Abijam (Abijah) | Maacah, daughter of Absalom | Negative | 1 Kgs 15:1-3 |
| Asa | Maacah, daughter of Absalom | Qualified Approval | 1 Kgs 15:9-11 |
| Jehoshaphat | Azubah, daughter of Shilhi | Qualified Approval | 1 Kgs 22:41-43 |
| Jehoram | | Negative | 2 Kgs 8:16-18 |
| Ahaziah | Athaliah of Israel, daughter of Ahab | Negative | 2 Kgs 8:25-27 |
| Athaliah (Queen) | | Not Recognized as Legitimate | No regnal formula (see 2 Kgs 11:1-20) |
| Joash (Jehoash) | Zibiah of Beersheba | Qualified Approval | 2 Kgs 12:1-3 |
| Amaziah | Jehoaddin of Jerusalem | Qualified Approval | 2 Kgs 14:1-4 |
| Azariah | Jecoliah of Jerusalem | Qualified Approval | 2 Kgs 15:1-4 |
| Jotham | Jerusha, daughter of Zadok | Qualified Approval | 2 Kgs 15:32-35 |
| Ahaz | | Negative | 2 Kgs 16:1-4 |
| Hezekiah | Abi, daughter of Zecharish | Positive | 2 Kgs 18:1-5 |
| Manasseh | Hephzibah | Negative | 2 Kgs 21:1-3 |

The Queen Mothers of Judah in the Regnal Formulas—continued

| King— continued | King's Mother— continued | King's Evaluation— continued | Regnal Formula— continued |
|--------------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Josiah | Jedidah of Bozkath, daughter of Adaiah | Positive | 2 Kgs 22:1-2 |
| Jehoahaz | Hamutal of Libnah, daughter of Jeremiah | Negative | 2 Kgs 23:31-34 |
| Jehoiakim | Zebidah of Rumah, daughter of Pedaiah | Negative | 2 Kgs 23:36-37 |
| Jehoiachin | Nehushta of Jerusalem, daughter of Elnathan | Negative | 2 Kgs 24:8-9 |
| Zedekiah | Hamutal of Libnah, daughter of Jeremiah | Negative | 2 Kgs 24:17-19 |

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