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The Alienation of Jezebel: Reading the Deuteronomic Historian's Portrait of Jezebel in the Contemporary Global Context

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THE ALIENATION OF JEZEBEL: READING THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORIAN’S POTRAIT OF JEZEBEL IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBALCONTEXT

A Dissertation by

BAYOR BENI KANDELMWIN CONRAD

SUBMITTED TO

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Doctor of Sacred Theology

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Committee Signatures:
ABSTRACT

Even the casual reader of the books of Kings will notice that the Deuteronomic Historian assigns a disproportionately large amount narrated time (Erzählzeit) to the reign of the house of Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29-2 Kgs 10). This is surprising because, in the judgment of the Deuteronomic Historian, “no one sold himself to do evil in the eyes of YHWH as did Ahab, incited by Jezebel, his wife.” (1Kgs 21:25). Why does the Deuteronomic Historian dedicate so much narrated space not only to Ahab but especially to the character and deeds of his wife, Jezebel? And why in this narrative does the Deuteronomic Historian craft such an unprecedentedly abhorrent and objectionable portrait of Jezebel that makes her completely unacceptable even surpassing the evil of her husband?

Recent scholarly research has provided a convincing picture of 9th-8th centuries B.C.E. Israel, the setting of the Jezebel story. Ironically, the research discloses a heterogeneous society that enjoyed great diversity, accommodated a variety of deities, hosted a multiplicity of ethnicities with an array of interlocking cultures. This would be a society in which a foreign-born queen like Phoenician Jezebel would not be an anomaly but would be accepted and at home in such an environment. But the deuteronomic narrative about her suggests otherwise.

Today, scholarship is almost unanimous in its view that the final redaction of the Deuteronomic History occurred in Judah in the exilic and post-exilic era. Although Judah was permitted to rebuild after the exile, it had to grapple with significant socio-cultural and religious changes and in particular, it had to define a new self-understanding. This dissertation argues that the Deuteronomic Historian’s alienating portrait of Jezebel coincides with and serves the interests of the change in Israel’s self-conceptualization, a change precipitated by the post-exilic crisis of identity. The narrative paints a portrait of Jezebel as ethnically, religiously and culturally unIsraelite. Her unacceptability in the narrative coincides with the exclusiveness that
characterized this redefinition of the Israelite community. It offers the Yehud community a clear
distinction between what is Israelite and what is not.

Such an analysis not only informs our reading of the Jezebel story but also sounds a warning
for today’s readers from a postcolonial perspective. The religious, ethnic, cultural and patriarchal
biases evident in the narrative of the Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel are still
perpetuated in various forms of discrimination today. The greatest tragedies of human history, the
senseless wars, holocausts, genocides and endless conflicts, have come about, in part, because the
maintenance of identity is so often at the expense of the construction of an “other”. There is more
that unites humanity than the religious, ethnic, cultural, gender or geopolitical space differences
that frequently pit “us” against “them. When diversity is seen only as a threat, the world loses!

Gina Hens-Piazza
Professor of Biblical Studies
Jesuit School of Theology of SCU
Berkeley, CA
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A work of this scope will not be possible without the generosity and sacrifices of numerous individuals and groups. I am grateful to the God for enkindling in me a keen interest and love for the Scriptures. My heartfelt gratitude to my indefatigable advisor, Professor Gina Hens-Piazza and readers, Professors John Endres, S.J., and Roberto Mata, for their invaluable guidance, suggestions and constructive criticism which made this project so much better. Huge thanks to Most Rev. Philip Naameh, metropolitan archbishop of Tamale, for his fraternal support and guidance. My sincere thanks to my family and friends in Ghana who made tremendous sacrifices on my behalf. I like to make a special mention of my cousins, Clare and Bruce Banoeng-Yakubu, whose generous financial support made this project possible. To Most Rev. Michael Barber, S.J., bishop of Oakland who received me in his diocese, and my pastor and brother, Fr. Carl Arcosa who offered me residence, I have no words to express the gratitude in my heart. The family of parishioners of Church of the Good Shepherd in Pittsburg, California, accepted me and gave me a home among them, supporting and encouraging me at every stage. They will forever be in my heart and my prayers. My sincere thanks to my friends, Bev and Maurice Portley of Phoenix, Arizona, who supported and cheered me on during this journey: All shall be well! I cannot mention, by name, all my many friends and well-wishers who encouraged and supported me, both materially and spiritually, in this project. May God richly bless everyone!
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Introduction

There are hardly any “homogeneous” countries in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, and race today. Multiculturalism has become the way to view and form “nationhood” in the Western world. At the end of the introduction to his book, *If this is Your Land, Where are your Stories?*, Edward Chamberlin asks a profoundly complex question: “Can one land really be home to more than one people? To native and newcomer? Or to Arab and Jew, Hutu and Tutsi, Albanian and Kosovar, Turk and Kurd? Can the world be home to all of us? I think so. But not until we have reimagined Them and Us.”¹ Some social scientists believe an individual’s identification with a certain group, ethnicity, or religion plays a determining role in how this individual assimilates or resists a new immigrant environment.² Should there be an ethnic, religious or cultural test for citizenship of any nation? How much assimilation is appropriate or how much resistance is permissible for individuals and groups, in respect of national identity formation? How much proximity is safe without fear of ‘corruption’ or ‘contamination’? Are hybridity and multiculturalism assets to be cherished or threats to sacralized identities? These and many more are questions that contemporary society must address.

All around the world, therefore, there is a growing mixing of peoples with diverse ethnic, religious and cultural affiliations. How should nations founded on Judeo-Christian values address this situation? Western culture is still nominally Christian and biblical principles play a significant role in major policy decisions. Can the Scriptures contribute any ideas

towards formulating comprehensive policies that effectively address questions relating to diversity, multiculturalism and identity? Identity formation is a dynamic process. The dynamism of the human person requires dynamism in the conceptualization of identity markers such as ethnicity, religion or culture. The Jezebel story has lessons about identity formation, about the dangers of exclusive or separationist nationalism, lessons about attitudes, about assimilation and resistance.

**THE JEZEBEL STORY**

Is there really a Jezebel Story in the Bible? The biblical references to Jezebel occur in 1 and 2 Kings and the narratives form part of the larger accounts of the reign of king Ahab and the Elijah-Elisha cycle. Like the queen of Sheba (1Kgs 10; 2 Chr 9) Jezebel is a foreign woman of royal heritage. Unlike the queen of Sheba, Jezebel did not just visit Israel and then return to her home. Jezebel became an Israeliite citizen through marriage and occupied the esteemed offices of queen and queen mother. ³ “By marriage, a woman left her parents, went to live with her husband, joined his clan, to which her children will belong.”⁴ For all her fame, however, Jezebel, unlike Ruth, Judith or Esther, does not have a book to her name or even an extensive narrative dedicated to her story.

³There is some debate whether the office of queen mother existed as an official functionary in Israel. Z. Ben-Barak argued in a 1991 article, “The Status and Rights of the Gēḇîrâ,” *JBL* 110 (1991), 23-34, that there were queen mothers who rose to positions of prominence and influence during their sons’ reigns, but their position was not an official one. This is contrary to the view of N.E.A. Andreasen in “The Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society” *CBQ* 45,(1983),179-94 who argued that the queen mother held a significant official position superseded only by the position of the king. In a recent monograph entitled, _Good Queen Mothers, Bad Queen Mothers: The Theological Presentation of the Queen Mother in 1 and 2 Kings_, CBQ Monographs Series 54, (Washington D.C: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2016) Ginny Brewer-Boyson notes six instances in which Jezebel is portrayed in the role of a queen mother in 1-2 Kings.

Indeed, the name “Jezebel” occurs a mere twenty-one (21) times in the MT (1 Kgs. 16:31; 18:4,13,19; 19:1-2; 21:5,7,11,14,15\textsuperscript{2x}, 23\textsuperscript{2x}, 25; 2 Kgs. 9:7, 10, 22, 36, 37\textsuperscript{2x}) She kills the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs. 18:4, 13); provides sustenance to the prophets of Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs. 18:19); threatens revenge against Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:1–2); arranges the execution of Naboth (1 Kgs. 21:5–15); and boldly confronts death with painted face and well-groomed hair (2 Kgs. 9:30–37). From these passages, a Jezebel character has been gleaned, a Jezebel story has emerged.

The portrait of Jezebel in contemporary literature, art and entertainment is almost consistently negative. Some recent studies have attempted to present a more balanced portrait of Jezebel.\textsuperscript{5} The biblical story of Jezebel is part of a nationalized story of Israel that incorporates diverse constituents whose individual histories and identities have been subsumed, reinterpreted, sometimes marginalized or even denigrated. Jezebel’s identity has suffered more than most in the Deuteronomic Historian’s\textsuperscript{6} redaction. There is a new Israelite identity and Jezebel is now an alien.

My interest in reading the Jezebel story as a narrative of marginalization is inspired by my personal experience in my country, Ghana where many minority tribes feel alienated as their stories and identities have been subsumed, marginalized, denigrated and, in some cases, expunged from the story and identity of the new nation. They have lost their stories, their land and their home, their identities.


\textsuperscript{6}In this dissertation, the author(s)/editor(s) of the Deuteronomic History, normally understood to be a group of scribes, will be referred to by the collective singular, Deuteronomic Historian.
THESIS STATEMENT

My thesis argues that the Deuteronomic Historian’s alienating portrait of Jezebel coincides with and serves the interest of the change in Israel’s self-conceptualization, a change precipitated by the post-exilic crisis of identity. By characterizing Jezebel as a Sidonian princess who appropriates the revered office of queen of Israel, *initiates and patronizes the cult of Baal* while totally disregarding Israelite cultural and ethical mores and norms, the Deuteronomic Historian portrays Jezebel as an “undesirable immigrant” whose corrupting idolatrous crusade must be surgically removed from Israel. The description of her ghastly death, mutilation, and the near total annihilation of her corpse, is an unequivocal message that Jezebel’s legacy ends with her. Hence it endorses the post-exilic exclusionist view that Jezebel and her kind should have no residence in Israel, a view endorsed by significant post-exilic voices like Ezra and Nehemiah.

This study will unfold in three parts. The first portion sets the stage for rereading Jezebel’s character and defending this thesis. This section rehearses the recent scholarship that has enabled a critical reconstruction of 9th-8th century Israel as ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse. The second portion overviews the scholarly reconstruction of post-exilic Judah as significantly different, revealing a situation of ethnic, religious and cultural exclusivism and separatism.

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7The Deuteronomic History and its presumed author(s), the Deuteronomic Historian(s) is a hypothetical construct largely accepted by a majority of contemporary biblical scholars. A few dissident voices such as Ernst Axel Knauf and E. Gerstenberger believe it is a dead hypothesis which offers fewer answers than questions. Cf. Ernst Axel Knauf, “Does ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography’ (DTRH) Exist?” in Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer & Jean-Daniel Macchi (eds) *Israel Constructs its History. Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*. JSOTSup 306 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 388-398
METHODOLOGY

The rich variety of the biblical texts ensures that no one method suffices for the entire Bible. Moreover, variety in methodology enables students of the Bible to explore the text from different perspectives. Nevertheless, some texts demand certain methodological approaches for best results. This dissertation will employ two basic methodological approaches that will bridge the needless gap between text and context: while it is true biblical texts have a historical context that needs to be explored, it is equally true that all texts have an after-life and convey a new meaning to new generations of readers. By means of a diachronic approach, I shall explore the historical environment to which the story of Jezebel refers. Recent research by historians and archaeologists such as Gösta Ahlström[^8], J. M. Miller[^9], J. H. Hayes[^10], Mario Leverani[^11], Alberto Soggin, and Israel Finkelstein have greatly contributed to our knowledge of life in the northern kingdom, Israel, in the period of the Omrides. Today, we have clearer picture of religion, politics, ethnicity and culture in 9th-8th century Israel, issues which I consider central to the Jezebel story.

[^10]: Ibid.
My second approach will be postcolonial exegesis. The works of Postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said\textsuperscript{12}, Homi Bhabha\textsuperscript{13} and Chinua Achebe\textsuperscript{14} have greatly sensitized readers concerning subtle strategies of manipulation, prejudice and even seduction embedded in colonial narratives of subaltern people. By virtue of a claim of power over subaltern peoples, imperialists believe they have acquired the right to define their subjects, the right to tell the stories of their subjects in order to lead them from ignorance to knowledge, from evil to good, from immoral to moral. Jezebel never gets to tell her own story. Indeed, her story is embedded in the imperial narrative of Judean scribes several centuries later. This imperial control of the biblical narratives is perhaps best captured by the title of Daniel Fleming’s monograph, \textit{The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible}.\textsuperscript{15} By means of a postcolonial reading of the Jezebel story, I will not only expose editorial biases of the Deuteronomistic Historian, but also explore the ways in which the Jezebel story speaks to fringe peoples in an era of globalization, an era of religious, ethnic and cultural pluralism.

\textbf{SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY}

On the academic level, it is my hope that this research will be an added voice in in the discussion concerning the complex relationship between Israel and Judah. The thrust


\textsuperscript{13}Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1994)


of this thesis is, however, aimed at stimulating the discussion on the increasing
diversification of the contemporary world and adding a fresh perspective on identity
construction, a perspective that is more open, more dynamic, more in consonance with
the human reality. Moreover, I believe my study will give impetus to the continuing
advocacy for fringe peoples who suffer discrimination due to religious, ethnic, cultural or
gender differentiation.

NATURE AND SCOPE

The world is constantly being transformed as people migrate and resettle in
strange lands among strange peoples. There is growing diversity which threatens
traditional societies holding on to sacred time-honored values. Diversity becomes a real
threat for such communities. What is the appropriate response? This study shall analyze
the Deuteronomic Historian’s response to an identity crisis in post-exilic Judah and the
consequences of that response. By reference to historical research and archaeological
finds, it shall demonstrate the considerable differences in socio-religious and cultural
environment in which Jezebel lived and that in which her story was reinterpreted by the
Deuteronomic Historian several centuries later.

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to
malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the
dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”16 Jezebel has been

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16Quote from Nigerian novelist and feminist advocate, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. From her 2009 TED
talk entitled, “The Danger of a Single Story.” For transcript, visit
maligned, defamed and discredited and dishonored for centuries on the evidence of her detractors. She does not represent herself. Is there, perhaps, a side of her story that is left untold or has been misinterpreted due to prejudice? A postcolonial reading of the Jezebel story will address this question.

This dissertation will not address the questions relating to the identity of the author(s) of the Deuteronomic History. It will also not explore or clarify issues relating to various stages of redaction of Deuteronomic History. It presumes, however, a final post-exilic Deuteronomic redaction.

While identity formation is crucial to both the individual and communities, it is important to acknowledge, respect and celebrate diversity. The contemporary global context acknowledges increasing diversification of communities. The dilemma facing many western societies has to do with managing diversity. Will the acceptance of immigrants from all faiths, ethnicities and cultures not subject traditional societies to identity crisis? Reading the Jezebel story in the context of the contemporary immigration debate, I shall emphasize the inevitability of the dislocation and resettlement of peoples, the inevitability of the diversification of communities worldwide, and the importance of discerning and denouncing narratives of exclusivism composed from prejudiced lenses with no foundations in fact and history.
CHAPTER ONE
REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP ON THE JEZEBEL STORY

Knowledge builds on knowledge. This dissertation is intended to be a humble contribution to an already growing literature on the Jezebel story and the complex issues relating to immigration and identity formation. It will build on foundations laid by very distinguished biblical scholars and social-historians. It will be impossible to mention all the brilliant scholarly discussions on these issues. This chapter shall review some of the literature considered useful to the argument of this dissertation. There are two categories of literature:

1. Primary Literature on the Jezebel Story
   a. Commentaries
   b. Monographs
   c. Dissertations
   d. Histories
   e. Articles

2. Secondary or Auxiliary Literature:
   a. Postcolonial Historiography
   b. Contemporary Immigration Debate

The New Testament has just one allusion to the Jezebel character in Rev 2:20:

“But I have this against you: you permit the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and misleading my servants into fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”

It is obvious that Jezebel’s fortunes have not changed. This Jezebel is similarly accused of apostasy and immorality, evoking memories of the original Jezebel. This sole reference in the New Testament is significant in that it gives us some idea of the
reception history of the Jezebel character in early Christianity. Jezebel is the name of any woman in whom religious difference converges with political power.

The very first interpretations of the biblical Jezebel character were in the form of references in sermons and hymns in patristic times. In patristic exegesis, largely dominated by allegorical and analogical interpretation, the Jezebel character and archetype were favorite sermon themes. Ephraim of Nisibis\(^1\) (306-378), noted for his exegetical writings, homilies, compositions of hymns, compared Jezebel to Sheol: “Sheol was not indeed Sheol, but its semblance: Jezebel was the true Sheol, who devoured the just.” (Nisbene Hymns, no. 67). St. Jerome\(^2\), a contemporary of Ephraim reputed for his translation of the Vulgate, commenting on the narrative of Naboth’s vineyard, translates vineyard with the Latin word *hortus* (garden). According to Jerome, Jezebel desired to cultivate a sensual garden for herself and Ahab motivated her to kill Naboth. He contended that the land Ahab and Jezebel acquired in this manner was Sodom’s vineyard, a symbol of sexual impropriety. In the ninth century, St. Methodius in his “Banquet of Ten Virgins”, refers to Jezebel as lust incarnate and suggested that it was Jezebel’s desires rather than political persecution from which Elijah fled.\(^3\) It is important to note that in all these references, the Jezebel character or archetype is consistently a negative figure to be scorned and ostracized. In the corridors of Medieval European palaces, Jezebel was remembered and compared to infamous women such as Catherine de Medici and Anne Boleyn: “they were both seen by many of their contemporaries as dangerous.


evil women who had the power to influence political events. They were Jezebels.” It is pretty safe to conclude that Jezebel has had a consistently negative reception down through the ages.

A. PRIMARY LITERATURE ON THE JEZEBEL STORY

a. Commentaries

It is important to recognize that the Jezebel story is an integral part of the Elijah-Elisha cycle within the Deuteronomistic History whose common final ‘authorship’ is no longer debated. Many commentators and biblical historians have made contributions to our overall understanding of the nature and purpose of this narrative corpus and characterization as well as the function of Jezebel in it. While acknowledging several significant commentaries, for the scope and focus of this dissertation, it will suffice to review three noteworthy commentaries which contribute different perspectives on interpreting the story of Jezebel. Walter Brueggemann makes a significant contribution to this debate when he writes:

the narrative does not intend to be ‘history’ as we, in our modern modes, understand the term. The narrative is not and does not purport to be a

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4 Gaines, Music in Old Bones, 99
5 Perhaps the very first attempts to give a balanced reading of the Jezebel portrait is in both the 1895 and 1898 editions of The Woman’s Bible edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
6 Martin Noth’s seminal work, Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien. Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament published in 1943 delineated the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian. However, Noth’s view that the work was attributable to a single redactor/author has now largely been abandoned in favor of multiple redactions (at least two or three).
‘factual account’ of the monarchical past. Rather consistently the narrative ‘footnotes’ its text in order to alert readers who want detailed ‘history’ that they can go to the ‘sources’ to check out the facts…Thus our text is not ‘history’. It is, rather, an interpretive commentary upon that royal history or, as we might say, it is a ‘theology of history’, an attempt to understand the vagaries of lived public experience in that world with particular reference to YHWH, the God of Israel.8

Brueggemann’s commentary is a bold application of the narrative to contemporary socio-political situations and debates. With respect to the Jezebel story, he admits to the heavy polemic in the narrative, a polemic rising from the Deuteronomistic Historian’s negative judgment on all Northern kings. In Brueggemann’s view, the narrative offers a critique of power politics. The clash between prophet and royalty reflects the endless tension between faith and politics. The prophetic voices are decisively clear: Yahweh’s will always prevails. The central theological theme, in Brueggemann’s terms, is the Endless Reopening of History: “whenever established power is entrenched, the God of Israel may, in violent ways, destabilize and reopen the public process of politics.”9 The restless subversive holiness of YHWH permits no absolutizing of human power. However, Brueggemann is wary of religious zealots, the “true believer” posture, the vigilante mentality that sees a straight line between faith and politics and prefers the ideology of the herem to the pragmatics of diplomacy. Brueggemann concludes:

“In our time, there is a kind of simplistic, vigilante politics of extremism that wants public policy to be organized by the mandates of ‘pure faith.’ There are no conclusions here, but we cannot miss the problematic character of such an enterprise. More reasoned, more pragmatic, more agile understanding indicates an interpretive maneuverability (slippage?) between theological affirmation and political enactment.”10

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8 Brueggemann, 1-2
9 Ibid., 206
10 Ibid., 255
Jerome T. Walsh offers a different perspective on the narrative. The significance of paying attention to the text in biblical studies cannot be overstated. Walsh’s approach focuses precisely on the text in its final form without denying the history behind the text. Indeed, he insists that *1 Kings* is a *historical narrative.* First, it is intended to be history, even if modern standards of historiography are different from those of the Deuteronomic Historian. Second, it contains history as it bears witness to a long and complicated process of composition. However, Walsh’s study focuses on the text as a narrative. While admitting the text has had a complicated history of transmission, his study will focus on the final form of the text. In basic terms, he reads the text as a story, a narrative with a narrator, a plot, characters, thematic elements and verbal techniques. Of special interest to my study are the techniques of literary characterization. As Walsh observes, “literary characters are made, not born. Narrators construct them out of words, and the ways in which the narrator accomplishes this construction are many. Most simply, he can tell us what he wants us to know about the character: physical details (1:6) emotional or mental qualities …moral assessment (16:25-26), and so forth.” Walsh divides *1 Kings* into four narrative units or stories: the story of Solomon (*1 Kings* 1-11), the story of Jeroboam (*1 Kings* 11:26-14:20), the story of Elijah (*1 Kings* 17-19) and the story of Ahab (*1 Kings* 20:1-22:40). He believes the narratives in these units are not just a collection of stories. Indeed, each of them has a deliberate literary structure. Jezebel is introduced in a bridge narrative between the stories of Jeroboam and Elijah dealing with the Kings of Judah and Israel (*1 Kings* 14:21-16:34), a narrative made up of brief formulaic accounts of the reigns of kings from Judah and Israel. It is significant that for the kings of Judah but not for

11 Walsh, xi
12 Ibid., xx
those of Israel, the *gēbirā* is mentioned. In this brief evaluation of Ahab’s reign, the narrative departs from the usual general theological statement. The details of his sins revolve around the introduction of Baal, which, in turn, is connected with Ahab’s marriage of a foreign woman, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. The Phoenician form of the name Ethbaal is *Ittobaal*, which means “Baal exists”. Moreover, Jezebel herself (’yzbl), is named after Baal since the element *zbl* means “Prince” and was a divine title of Baal. There can be little doubt that the narrative connects the entry of Baal worship into Israel with Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel. “Baal will be Yahweh’s chief rival for Israel’s worship throughout the centuries of the monarch. Here, the first time the god’s name appears in 1Kings, it sneaks into the text under cover of Ahab’s foreign marriage.”

Jezebel is at the center of this rivalry between Yahweh and Baal. This rivalry is highlighted in different episodes by contrasting characters: Elijah versus Ahab, Elijah versus Jezebel, the widow of Zarephath versus Jezebel, Obadiah versus Ahab/Jezebel and the people of Israel versus the prophets of Baal. The climactic contest on Carmel foreshadows the eventual victor and the fate of the vanquished. The severity of the threat represented by Jezebel is particularly highlighted in the narrative of Naboth’s Vineyard. According to Walsh, to understand the narrative, two questions must be answered: what is the fundamental evil the story seeks to highlight? And who is the main character? Walsh is of the view that the fundamental evil exposed by the text is the inherent assault on fundamental institutions of Israelite society. “The story, then, is not simply the tragedy of an individual; Naboth is only the most obvious victim. The religious uniqueness of Israel, rooted in the covenant and enshrined in law and tradition,
is equally assaulted.” With regards to the main character, Walsh points out the fact that both Jezebel and Ahab play dominant roles. Nevertheless, though largely passive, Naboth whose name actually occurs more times than those of Jezebel and Ahab combined, “haunts the narrative like an unpeaceable ghost”. Therefore, the narrative has been rightly titled the story of Naboth. The literary analysis of the story of Naboth also raises serious questions concerning its unity. The text appears to have been tweaked. First, the narrator “breaks frame, that is, steps out of the story, as it were, to address the reader directly. . . . Second, verses 25-26 are unusually complex grammatically.” The effect of this is that the narrator shifts blame from Ahab to Jezebel, a result that does not follow from the facts. Walsh concludes that “the stratagem of blaming woman for the sins of man is certainly no stranger to human society, including biblical tradition (see, for example, 1 Timothy 2:14!)” The significance of this for redaction criticism is enormous.

Gina Hens-Piazza offers a literary approach to the narratives that highlights the ethical implications of the texts. She believes the narratives are best described by the old-fashioned phrase, salvation history. These narratives “are testimonies composed over time to witness to peoples experience of God’s involvement in the unfolding events of their lives. . . . Thus, defining 1 and 2 Kings by any one of these categories alone-history,  

14 Ibid., 327  
15 Ibid., 327  
16 Ibid., 332  
17 Ibid., 334  
literature, theology- shortchanges their character.” Combining, therefore, literary, exegetical and theological-ethical analysis, Hens-Piazza exposes readers to the treasure hidden in these narratives. With respect to the narrative on the reign of Ahab, there is a growing decadence starting from the “sin of Jeroboam.” This reaches a crescendo with Ahab, son of Omri, whose sin is described in greater detail: besides repeating the errors of his predecessors, “the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat”, Ahab also sinned in marrying a foreign wife, the Sidonian princess Jezebel. Hens-Piazza draws attention to the theological polemic that permeates the subsequent narratives and which even condones violence. On the characterization of Jezebel in this context, Hens-Piazza observes: “Whether or not her condemnation is legitimate, it remains consistent across the narrative. Still, we must at least entertain the possibility that Jezebel serves as a narrative scapegoat, an outsider blamed for a family’s sins and a nation’s misfortune.” I find this point especially important since projection and scapegoating are significant defense mechanisms that must be acknowledged and addressed in the immigration debate. Carrying the text beyond the historical and literary analysis to its enduring ethical significance is the special quality of this commentary.

I believe these commentaries are sufficiently representative and adequately sum up the present state of the scholarship on the historical, literary, as well as theological-ethical considerations regarding the books of Kings and the Jezebel story.

20 Ibid., 1-2
21 Ibid., 288
b. Monographs

Janet Howe Gaines’ 1999 book, *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages* is one of the most significant contributions to Jezebel scholarship in the last half a century and certainly the most comprehensive summary of the diverse interpretations of the Jezebel character from biblical times. The foreign woman, the idolater from Phoenicia, Jezebel posed a serious threat to the stability of the Israelites' single male deity. So powerful was this threat that writers through the ages have portrayed her as the incarnation of feminine evil, and her name has become synonymous with the misogynist view of women as seductresses. Janet Howe Gaines argues that the bride of the Israelite king Ahab became a convenient scapegoat for biblical writers who portrayed her as the primary force behind their nation's apostasy. The narrative portrays Jezebel as a murderer of prophets and people and a disruptive force for evil.

*Music in the Old Bones* is a feminist interpretation of the biblical story. Beginning with a scholarly analysis of the story of Jezebel from both a traditional and a feminist perspective, Gaines discusses the portraits of Jezebel in literature, art and drama through the centuries. Misogynists revisited her unburied bones to retell her story and warn generations about the dangers of rebelling against patriarchal society. From the sermons of St. Ephraim and John Knox through the novels of Pamela Frankau (1937) and

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Frank Gill Slaughter\textsuperscript{25}, from the poetry of Charles Heavysege\textsuperscript{26}, in ballads and in dramas, the character of Jezebel has been explored, interpreted and adapted for various ends. Unfortunately, few break away from tradition to offer balanced interpretations based on scholarly research. Gaines has succeeded in doing this and in offering a reference book for Jezebel scholarship. Using inspiration from a line of the poet F.R. Higgins, Gaines hopes that her book helps readers savor once again, *Music in the Old Bones*: “In listening to that dissonant music, perhaps we can hear new chords and expand our understanding of the inharmonious melody that is Jezebel’s life.”\textsuperscript{27} *Music in Old Bones* highlights the vulnerability of the identities of fringe people. Besides exposing the prejudices of the narrator, the book similarly exposes how many of the negative portraits of Jezebel have no basis in the actual biblical narrative. Gaines’ book highlights one of the main concerns of post-colonial criticism. Like Jezebel, many minorities’ stories are told for them and their identities engraved in colonial concepts and categories, and judged by colonial standards, leaving a damaged portrait for posterity.

Eleanor Ferris Beach’s book, *The Jezebel Letters*\textsuperscript{28} is one of the best contributions to the growing body of research into the roles women played in ancient Israelite society. The fact that she writes in a popular style, creating a fictitious archive of personal correspondence unfortunately detracts from the book’s scholarly value.\textsuperscript{29} Beach presents


\textsuperscript{27} Gaines, xvii


\textsuperscript{29} A similar work by renowned British-American journalist, Lesley Hazleton, entitled *Jezebel: The Untold Story of the Bible’s Harlot Queen* (New York: Doubleday, 2007) masks brilliant research in its fiction novel style.
Jezebel as a creative social and political force in ninth-century Israel, who used her intelligence and ingenuity to improve the lives of Israelites, Phoenicians, and Judeans alike. *The Jezebel Letters* attempts to help us reconstruct ninth-century Israel and its neighbors. Beach argues against the traditional portrayal of ancient women as passive and powerless. She explores the position of the royal woman and presents an interesting, if controversial, reconstruction of the ways in which Jezebel functioned within the king’s court. The Biblical narrative leaves no doubts that Jezebel was a villain, infamous for subverting justice, perverting religion, corrupting her husband, Ahab and thus contributing to the end of the Omri dynasty. For Beach, the “destiny of kings is shaped as much by strategies in the women’s quarters as by tactics on the battlefield.”  

Utilizing research by Susan Ackerman and others exploring the role of the *gēbirā* or queen mother in Israel and Judah, Beach places Jezebel in a context in which she could exploit family connections in both Phoenicia and Judah. The major weakness of Beach’s argument is no doubt the fact that most of her characterization is based on ‘reasonable’ conjecture. In many instances, Beach seems to attribute more power to Jezebel than any queen mother might have possessed in the period. One significant contribution of *The Jezebel Letters* is, no doubt, its analysis and contextualization of the numerous small city-states and nations of the region, the commerce between them and their reaction to the increasing Assyrian menace. The portrait of Jezebel’s role in this context, it must be conceded, is little more than speculative.

*The Jezebel Letters* is a valiant effort to narrate the story from the perspective of Samaria, its non-Davidic kings, its heterodox religion and culture. Moreover, the

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30 Beach, 139
epistolary style of the book permits Beach to present details of daily life that are often neglected in traditional histories. Urban and rural situations, such as life in places like Samaria, Jezreel, and Jerusalem come to life. The book incorporates ancient documents which provide historical grounding for the fictional narrative.\footnote{Beach uses documents such as the \textit{Mesha Inscription}, the \textit{Tell Dan Inscription} and the \textit{Black Obelisk epigraph}.}

From a methodological standpoint, Patricia Dutcher-Walls’ \textit{Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen} in the Interfaces series is a significant contribution to studies on Jezebel.\footnote{Patricia Dutcher-Walls, \textit{Jezebel. Portraits of a Queen}, Interfaces, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004)} Dutcher-Walls employs narrative and sociological criticism to reveal two portraits of Jezebel. First, from the narrative point of view she is a character in the story. Second, as a queen, she resides within a definite historical, socio-cultural and political environment. The first part of the book is dedicated to a very detailed step by step presentation of the various narrative elements of narrative with a focus on rhetoric and a portrait of Jezebel as queen and queen mother from a narrative analysis of the passages in which she is directly or indirectly mentioned. This analysis reveals how the writers present Jezebel as a powerful, assertive, yet decidedly evil person. In the second section of the book, Dutcher-Walls analyzes the social context of the agrarian monarchy of 9th-8th century Israel as a type of social organization within which certain defined social dynamics operate. The dominant role of the elite is very much emphasized and the significant dynamics at work in such societies are pointed out.

In the concluding chapter, Dutcher-Walls attempts an interface of the two methodological approaches with a view to revealing the special theological interests and worldview of the writers. By contrasting the positive values of the prophetic figures of
Elijah and Elisha with the vicious Jezebel, the Deuteronomistic Historian hopes to challenge the readers to a commitment of faith. Dutcher-Walls is categorical about what this study does not seek to accomplish: “Neither narrative nor sociological criticism depends on historical judgments - that is, judgments about the occurrence of events, or the accuracy of depictions of the persons involved, or the probability of causal factors of events and trends, all of which are often described in a ‘historical’ account or discussed in a history of an event or person or era.”

**c. Dissertations**

Two recently published dissertations on the Jezebel story in the last couple of decades deserve mention. Dagmar Pruin’s 2004 Berlin Humboldt University dissertation titled *Geschichten und Geschichte. Isabel als Literarische und Historische Gestalt* makes a significant contribution by subjecting the narrative of 1 Kings 16–2 Kings 10 to both synchronic and diachronic analysis. From a “reasonable” reconstruction of Israel’s history, Pruin sheds light on the various levels of story and history. She concludes that the text in its present form presents an array of gaps and varying images of Jezebel. These gaps and images have been variously filled and interpreted by scholars through the ages. Those interested in history, from H. Ewald to J. Gaines have filled these gaps with multiple, mostly questionable, reconstructions. Pruin contends that 1 Kings 16–2 Kings 10 comprises pre-Deuteronomistic, Deuteronomistic, and post-Deuteronomistic strata, each with its own *Isebelbild*. Despite the obvious redactions, Pruin believes that the

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33 Dutcher-Walls, xiii  
36 See Gaines,30ff.
Jezebel character is based on a historical figure: she was a Phoenician princess who exercised a great influence within the Omride royal family and somehow suffered a very violent death. Her significance is suggested by the extensive coverage given to her death in the pre-Deuteronomistic passage of 2 Kgs 9:30-37. According to Pruin it is unlikely that Jezebel enjoyed the privileges of queen mother since the office did not exist in biblical Israel. Furthermore, contrary to the evidence in the narrative, Jezebel was never really involved in religious conflict as this was not really an issue in this early period.

From an African postcolonial feminist perspective, I will like to acknowledge Wabyanga Robert Kuloba’s 2011 Ph.D thesis at the University of Glasgow entitled *The Berated Politicians: Other ways of reading Miriam, Michal, Jezebel and Athaliah in the Old Testament in relation to Political and Gender Quandary in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya and Uganda as case studies*. The study focuses on women and politics in sub-Saharan Africa with Uganda and Kenya as case studies. These countries have very similar colonial histories. They are predominantly Christian and the Bible is a very significant literature in the lives of people. It is the Word of God that rules in matters of faith, as well as in the socio-political discourse of the people. In both of these countries, there has been a rise in female participation in politics. Unfortunately, this has been accompanied by rising cases of verbal and even physical abuse of female politicians. The patriarchal worldview of ancient biblical society has a lot in common with that of many African culture. There is a certain discomfort in the concept of “powerful woman.” The

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biblical image of Jezebel is often used as an agent of this misogyny. This Canaanite queen turned ‘harlot’ is the new name of the political threat posed by the emerging women politicians of East Africa.

d. Histories

Writing a history of ancient Israel appears no longer to be a profitable enterprise. Nevertheless, the quest to reasonably reconstruct the historical background of the biblical narratives has never ceased. Archaeological discoveries and the use of interpretive models from the ancient Near East environment continue to yield significant results and shed more light on the historical background of the biblical stories. From the older history books, Gösta W. Ahlström’s *The History of Ancient Palestine* provides reliable, balanced and comprehensive coverage of Palestine in biblical times.38 According to Ahlström, “Religion can create whatever ‘history’ it wants or needs. The modern historian is here faced with two problems, and both are legitimate research object: the actual history of the peoples/nations, and the history of their self-understanding and religion.”39 Mario Liverani’s *Israel’s History and the History of Israel* is another unique and very useful resource.40 Liverani describes his approach as “a new version of the history of Israel, starting from the results of textual and literary criticism as well as from

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39 Ibid., 28
data collected by archaeology and epigraphy. In doing this I have felt free to change the
Biblical plot, while keeping a properly historical approach.”

Miller and Hayes’ classic textbook of biblical history, *A History of Ancient Israel
and Judah* examines the political and economic factors that give context to the actions of
Israelite kings narrated in the Bible. Miller and Hayes approach biblical history
judiciously, they are both radical and conservative in their interpretation of evidence,
paying detailed attention to the nature, strengths, and limitations of various forms of
evidence for understanding and reconstructing Israel’s history.

I will like to briefly summarize the relevant scholarly opinions in respect to the
historical issues in the Jezebel story. The birth of historical criticism in the 18th century
and the subsequent scholarly works on source and redaction criticism, led also to a
spirited inquiry into the historicity of biblical characters. Increasingly, scholars
recognized that characters such as Jezebel had been heavily redacted by the
Deuteronomic Historian. Consequently, some scholars tended to focus on Jezebel more
as a literary or archetypal character than as a historical figure. Recent histories of Israel
by scholars such as Niels P. Lemche, Miller and Hayes try to identify a historical
kernel. Others, like J. A. Soggin postulated that Jezebel may actually be a literary
character connected with an anonymous Phoenician wife of Ahab. G. Fohrer
questioned the historicity of Elijah’s challenge of Ahab’s liberal policies and

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41 Ibid., xvi.
44 J.A. Soggin, *A History of Israel*, 209. Ahlström believes the name Jezebel is an intentional, possibly
dirty, pun of the real name of this Phoenician queen which has not been preserved. Cf. Ahlström, 574, footnote 3.
consequently the severity of the characterization of Jezebel. He believed this is unlikely on the scale in which it is presented in view of what is known or can be inferred from the conditions of Ahab’s reign. The contest on Carmel would have been less dramatic and the vindication of Yahwism less drastic than the slaughter of Baal prophets. The apprehension concerning the influence of the Canaanite Baal cult was characteristic of the custodians of the religion of Israel long before the time of Elijah. The alliance of Ahab with the Phoenicians, sealed by his marriage to Jezebel would, no doubt, have given greater impetus to the Baal cult and stimulated Elijah to rally the people to their ancestral faith. According to Fohrer, the persecution of the prophets of Yahweh and the prophetic resistance to the Baal cult together with the protests against the fertility cult, serve as unifying motifs for the collection of stories about Elijah. While agreeing with Fohrer in his analysis, Gray is convinced that these narratives are not purely a literary device: “If the collection of these traditions is as early as Fohrer himself suggests, we are entitled to regard the great prophetic protest against the religious syncretism and the subsequent persecution as reflecting the true perspective on the events in which Elijah was involved at a remove perhaps of only one generation.”

Ahlström disagrees:

“the stories of the Elijah-Elisha cycle most probably refer to a time later than that of king Ahab. They are not reliable source materials for the social and religious circumstances during Ahab’s time. The D-historian has used these traditions for the sole purpose of devaluing Ahab. He may even have reshaped them. His main purpose has been to depict Ahab and his entourage as Baal worshippers, which nobody should be, and to highlight Jezebel’s bad influence upon king, court and religious leaders.

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The purpose is polemical. Under such circumstances, historical information is of less importance.

What is historical and what is not? How is historical to be understood?

e. Articles

There has been no lack of scholarly interest in the Jezebel story and the wider Elijah-Elisha narrative in the last half century. Among the numerous articles on the Jezebel story three make important contributions to this dissertation. In her 1999 article, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel”, Susan Ackerman argued that, contrary to popular opinion, the Queen Mother in Israel did indeed have a cultic role. There was much greater latitude in religious beliefs and practices in Israel than the exilic and post-exilic editors of the biblical accounts admit. Phyllis Trible comes to the defense of Jezebel with very compelling arguments from a feminist perspective. In her 1995 JBL presentation, “Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers”, she writes:

Surrounded by the nouns “wife” and “daughter”, Jezebel enters Israel in an arrangement between males. Husband and father define her. In addition, the scatological spelling of her name, pointed in Hebrew to yield the perverted meaning ‘dung’, signifies utter contempt as it presages her eventual demise. No woman (or man) in the Hebrew Scriptures endures a more hostile press than Jezebel.

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48 Ahlström, 585.  
49 Cf. Susan Ackerman, “The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel” in JBL, vol. 112 3(Autumn, 1993), 385-401  
51 Ibid., 4.
Bradley L. Crowell explores the Deuteronomistic Historian’s characterization of foreign women to expose the colonial entanglements in his “Good Girl, Bad Girl: Foreign Women of the Deuteronomistic History in Postcolonial Perspective.”

1. SECONDARY OR AUXILIARY LITERATURE
   a. Postcolonial Readings and Historiography

   There cannot be any serious discussion of postcolonial criticism without reference to its roots in the works of its founding fathers. Edward Said’s seminal work, Orientalism, is largely regarded as a foundational document of postcolonial criticism. Basically, Said explains how colonial perspectives are first formed from reading novels of savages and monsters beyond the horizon of the known world. These perceptions, no matter how wrong, are then reinforced by writings, reports, novels and even histories of colonial tourists and administrators who returned to Europe with narratives of monsters and savage lands. The concepts of the "difference" and the "strangeness" of the Orient are perpetuated through the media and through an "Us" and "Them" discourse, a binary social relation by which the colonialists defined themselves by pointing out the differences between Orient and Occident. Basically, the West defined itself and its values by pointing out the savagery and backwardness of its opposite, the Orient. Postcolonial critics of different backgrounds analyze and explain

misrepresentations due to prejudice, misunderstanding, misconceptualization, and generalization.

A good example of this form of criticism is in the work of celebrated Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe chronicles the traumatic consequences of colonial rule on the subaltern Igbo people.54 Traditional values, religious beliefs and practices were condemned and destroyed by the imperialists. They used various strategies to seduce and convince the subaltern population to prefer colonial culture, education, religion and value system and to be contemptuous of their own. In colonial literature, the subaltern religion, ethics and value system was frequently interpreted with a prejudiced western mindset, and condemned.

Daniel Fleming’s much acclaimed 2012 book *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* is typical of postcolonial historiography.55 All students of the Bible are familiar with the complexity and lack of precision regarding the name Israel. The basic determination concerns deciding which Israel one is speaking about: is it Israel as the United Kingdom of David or as Northern Kingdom or even as a people without a homeland? Fleming’s book is a bold attempt to shed light on these most vexing questions of the relationship between Israel and Judah: “To locate the biblical narrative in history, we must decide how to read the Bible’s representation of Judah as part of Israel. The question is not so much whether some

connection existed but whether the people of Judah would have shared the same stories as Israel, with the same ideas about identity and the past.”

In The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism, Regina Schwarz makes a compelling argument about the violence associated with identity formation. She argues that there is violence in the very construction of the other. Groups define themselves by virtue of who they are not! There is always the feeling of tension, the threat of a violent breach of the borders by the outsider: “Ironically, the outsider is believed to threaten the boundaries that are drawn to exclude him, the boundaries his very existence maintain. Outside by definition but always threatening to get in, the other is poised in a delicate balance that is always off balance because fear and aggression continually weight the scales. Identity forged against the other inspires perpetual policing of its fragile borders.” Schwarz argues that the very concept of monotheism which commands allegiance to one God, one Land, one Nation and one People, is the basis of collective identity forged in violence against the other. Numerous biblical texts are constructed as narratives of division, of exclusion, of scarcity and competition that eventually erupt in violence. The story of Jezebel is one such narrative.

Western societies have imbibed these narratives as perennial religious truths. Consequently, Western Christian culture is pervaded with deep assumptions about collective identities with consequent collective hatred, collective degradation and collective abuse.

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56 Ibid., xii.
58 Ibid., 5
Historiography and Identity (Re)formation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature edited by Louis Jonker, contains essential articles from scholars of diverse backgrounds engaged in deliberations and critical review of historiographical narratives from the Second Temple era in postcolonial perspective.\(^5\) Historical narratives contribute to the process of identity formation. “Using the past in order to find a renewed identity in new (socio-political and socio-religious) circumstances is something also witnessed in Hebrew Bible historiographies.”\(^6\) The book is arranged in two parts. The first part, titled “Deliberations”, includes essays from conference presentations dealing with Deuteronomistic History, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The second part contains four “Responses” to the “Deliberations”. Three papers deserve special mention because they develop arguments related to the thesis of this project. The first is the article of Jon Berquist entitled, “Identities and Empire: Historiographical Questions for the Deuteronomistic Historian in the Persian Period.”\(^6\) In this presentation, Berquist questions how historiographical literature created, assembled or transmitted under the influence of the Persian empire functioned. How does the Old Testament literature from this period function in the processes of identity construction? Berquist argues that there is a tendency of misreading owed to the scholarly penchant to fuse the Deuteronomic History with a prior agenda in Deuteronomy and a subsequent longing of messianism. For Berquist, the Deuteronomic History is a work of imperially (Persian) sponsored scribes who sought to demonstrate that Judeans should not be allowed self-governance.

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\(^6\) Ibid., xi

for their own protection and interests. Indeed, the Deuteronomic History concerns itself with the impossibility of human self-governance. The work was to encourage Judeans to see themselves as part of an empire rather than as members of a separate people. However, much later, colonial Yehud claimed this work as an identity forming narrative. For Berquist, the Deuteronomic History, “as a narrative, is an evolutionary story of state formation, moving from simple forms such as chiefdoms to true states such as the monarchy, and eventually to the post-state realities of imperial domination.”  

The second paper of interest, and relevant to this project, authored by Mark G. Brett is entitled, “National Identity as Commentary and as Metacommentary.” Brett revisits an argument initiated by Benedict Anderson in his 1991 book entitled, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. In this book, Anderson argues that nationalism is a modern phenomenon to be associated with the invention of the printing press and the decline of divinely authorized dynasties. This has been contested by many biblical scholars who argue that nationalism did exist in the ancient world. Brett takes a somewhat middle line, arguing, on the one hand that there was some form of social cohesion and a forging of a ‘national brotherhood’ over and above tribe and clan relations. Nevertheless, it is “highly doubtful that the Deuteronomic

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62 Ibid., 11  
63 Mark G. Brett, “National Identity as Commentary and as Metacommentary” in Jonker, 29-40.  
65 See David Goodblatt’s 2006 book, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism*, or A. Hastings’ *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (1997). In opposition to a historiography which limits nations and nationalism to the eighteenth century and after, as an aspect of modernization, Professor Hastings argues for a medieval origin to both, dependent upon biblical religion.
theologians imagined that they were in the business of forging a national ‘identity’ in something like a modern sense.”

In “Identity (Re)formation as the Historical Circumstances Required”, Raymond F. Person, Jr. argues that the Deuteronomic school emerged from the exiled community of scribes in Babylon. According to Person, the Deuteronomic school was the official scribal guild of the Jerusalem bureaucracy which was responsible for the first redaction of the Deuteronomic History. While providing theological justification for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile as well as their place within the exiled Judean bureaucracy, this redaction which occurred in the early Persian period, also aimed at promoting an identity that was both imperial and postcolonial, tolerating relations with Persia while pushing for the full restoration of Israel. By contrast, Chronicles, composed in the late Persian period, advocated an identity of common ancestry of the various Judean rival groups. Ezra-Nehemiah similarly promoted an identity of common ancestry while pushing for stricter boundaries to exclude the foreigner.

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66 Brett, 39
67 Raymond F. Person Jr., “Identity (Re)formation as the Historical Circumstances Required” in Jonker, 113-121
CHAPTER TWO:
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE JEZEBEL STORY

A. Introduction
B. Ethnicity: The Peoples of the Northern Kingdom
C. The Omride Dynasty
D. Religious Pluralism: Yahweh, Baal, Asherah and the Other Deities
E. The Fall of the Northern Kingdom
F. Conclusion

A. INTRODUCTION

The events of the Jezebel story world are narrated against the backdrop of the socio-political and religious environment in 9th-8th century B.C.E. Israel, the northern kingdom. This chapter reconstructs that environment in so far as historical research and recent archaeological discoveries inform us. The biblical narrative makes a blanket negative judgment of all the northern kings. Indeed, the bulk of them are dismissed with a few sentences: Nadab (1Kgs.15:31), Baasha (1Kgs. 16:5), Elah (1Kgs. 16:14), Zimri (1Kgs. 16:20) and Omri (1Kgs. 16:27). Only Jeroboam I and Ahab receive substantial narrative coverage. The attention paid to Jeroboam arises because he is accused of leading the rebellion that began the apostasy of the northern tribes and ultimately led to its destruction (1Kgs 13:34). Ahab receives considerable coverage mainly because he married the Phoenician princess who is accused of introducing a rival cult, Baal (1Kgs.16:31). Ahab is pictured as a puppet king, played by his foreign wife and unwillingly tugged along by the prophet Elijah. Much of the biblical narrative of this crucial period is dedicated to the activities of the prophets Elijah and Elisha (1Kgs 17-2Kgs 10), interspersed with descriptions of the aberrations of Ahab and Jezebel who persecuted the prophets of YHWH and corrupted the land. Until about the middle of the last century, the biased narrative, coupled with the paucity of extra-biblical comparative

material, meant that scholars had to rely mostly on what they could glean from other parts of the Bible.

This chapter reviews the findings of contemporary historical and archaeological research regarding the northern kingdom, Israel, which the biblical narrative portrays as a breakaway nation composed of rebellious northern tribes (1 Kgs 12) These findings suggest that Israel, before its fall in 721 B.C.E., may very well have been an independent state whose history only came to be appropriated by Judah after the Assyrian conquest in 721 B.C.E. This is a position held by a growing number of scholars.¹ In a 2010 article, “The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel”, Na’aman states that among contemporary scholars,

it is widely accepted that biblical historiography – which extended the name ‘Israel’ to cover both kingdoms, collectively designating their inhabitants ‘Israelites’ – did not, in fact, appear prior to the annexation of the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian empire in 720 B.C.E., and that the extension of the name ‘Israel’ in the prophetic literature to include the Kingdom of Judah and its inhabitants dates no earlier than 720 BCE.² Na’aman argues that at some point in history, Judahite scribes and elite felt that the two nations belonged together on account of their common deity, YHWH. These scribes cleared the name “Israel” of its previous geographical and political connotations and imprinted on it a new cultural and religious meaning. He believes this process took place

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as part of the reforms of Josiah who took advantage of the annexation of Israel by Assyria to appropriate Israel’s prestigious patrimony.

The fact that Israel was a much larger geographical entity, and that it was more prosperous than its southern neighbor is incontrovertible. As we shall see, it was also home to diverse ethnic groups and enjoyed considerable flexibility in the practice of religion.

Biblical scholarship has enjoyed tremendous impetus in the last century from archaeological finds in the territories occupied by biblical Israel and Judah, as well as from an increasing amount of textual evidence from the Ancient Near East. The discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets in 1928 and subsequent archaeological finds at sites such as Tel-Dan, Tell el-Farah, Khirbet el-Qom, and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, has provided useful comparative documents to stimulate biblical studies.

With the evidence from these findings and scholarly research about 9th-7th century Israel, it is possible to reconstruct a plausible picture of the historical situation in Israel during the Omri dynasty as well as the socio-political, religious and cultural environment to which the story of Jezebel refers. The evidence suggests that 9th-8th century Israel was a pluralistic society with a variety of often competing deities. Contemporary biblical scholarship presents two divergent views of the united monarchy and its relationship to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In the first half of the last century, Albrecht Alt had argued that the Davidic-Solomonic empire was an aberration. According to him, David imposed unity on the Israelite tribes by his personal leadership and charisma. However, 

this unity was fragile, superficial and temporary. It collapsed at the end of Solomon’s reign as Rehoboam could not hold the tribes together. In sum, this position argues that the biblical portrait is idealistic and masks the fundamental reality of division between northern and southern tribes. According to Roland de Vaux, there was never really the concept of an Israelite state: “The federation of Twelve Tribes, the kingship of Saul, that of David and Solomon, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the post-exilic community, all these are so many different regimes. We may even go further to say that there never was an Israelite idea of the state.” For de Vaux it was actually religion that federated the tribes. J. Alberto Soggin convincingly argued that 9th century Judah was a very poor land, sustained by breeding livestock and cut off from the major trade routes. Conversely, Israel was a prosperous crafts and commerce hub with a thriving urban culture served by a network of international trade routes.

The archaeological findings of Kathleen Kenyon in the 1960s and the work of Yigal Shiloh between 1978-1983 raised serious questions about a great Davidic-Solomonic kingdom in the 10th century.

After analyzing recent archaeological evidence, Israel Finkelstein concludes: “If there was a historical United Monarchy, it was that of the Omride dynasty and it was ruled from Samaria.” According to Finkelstein, there is no evidence that territorial states

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6 Ibid., 191-92
7 British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon carried out extensive works around Jericho in the 1950s and around “the City of David” from 1961-7. Yigal Shiloh, an Israeli archaeologist conducted further excavations around Jerusalem in the 1970s and 1980s. Both works raised doubts concerning the biblical depiction of the Davidic-Solomonic empire.
8 Israel Finkelstein, “A Great United Monarchy”, 23
emerged before the 9th century. “Ironically, the only evidence for a prosperous United
Monarchy is the appeal of the Deuteronomistic historian to the collective memory of the
people of Judah in his own time, promising them the recovery of a past golden age.”9

Amihai Mazar takes a more cautious approach. He argues that while it is evident that
much of the biblical narrative about David and Solomon is pure fiction or hugely
embellished, “the total deconstruction of the United Monarchy and the devaluation of
Judah as a state in the ninth century (…) is based, in my view, on unacceptable
interpretations of the available data.”10 In his opinion, a revisionist theory that compels us
to discard an entire library of scholarly work without taking into account that the text
might have preserved valuable historical information from earlier documents and oral
traditions, is unacceptable. While admitting that these traditions cast in the form of
literature, legend or epic were inserted to the later Israelite historiography, thickly veiled
in theology and ideology, many indeed contain kernels of historical truth.

B. ETHNICITY IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

In this study, ethnicity refers to the culture of people of a given geographic region,
who claim a common ancestry and share a common language, religion and customs.
Questions about the date when the name “Israel” appears for the first time in history
together with the identity and nature of this first entity known as “Israel” are beyond the

10 Amihai Mazar, “Archaeology and the Biblical Narrative: The Case of the United Monarchy”, in Kratz and Spieckermann, 52
limits of this project.\textsuperscript{11} The complexity of such a quest is perhaps best captured by Philip R. Davies when he writes: “We must learn to think in terms of ‘three Israels’: one is literary (the biblical), one is historical (the inhabitants of the northern Palestinian highlands during part of the Iron Age as recovered archaeologically) and the third ‘ancient Israel’, is what (contemporary) scholars have constructed out of an amalgam of the two others.”\textsuperscript{12} Gösta Ahlström believes that several chiefdoms or kingdoms united under Saul to form the first political entity known as Israel, which may have been an old territorial name.\textsuperscript{13}

However, as the following discussion will show, contrary to the portrait of a nation comprised of a monolithic population with common ethnic identity, the northern kingdom was a diverse collation of peoples, both Israelite and Canaanite.

The biblical narrative indicates that at some point in history ten Israelite tribes coalesced into a state occupying the northern part of Palestine. The process by which these individual tribes metamorphosed into a nation is still shrouded in mystery. In a 2003 article, Kent Sparks analyzed a number of tribal lists and came to very significant conclusions.\textsuperscript{14} He argued that in the Song of Deborah, Judg. 5, considered the oldest Israelite tribal list, “we have a list of northern provenance that lacks Judah and Simeon and that is associated with traditions about the heroic northern judges.”\textsuperscript{15} In the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33), also deemed to be of northern provenience and dated later than the

\textsuperscript{11}The earliest known extra-biblical occurrence of the name “Israel” is in the Merneptah stele dated to circa 1208 B.C.E. The reference seems to be to a federation of tribes. G. Ahlström believes that several chiefdoms or kingdoms united under Saul to form the first political entity.
\textsuperscript{12} Philip R. Davies, \textit{In Search of “Ancient Israel”}. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992),11
\textsuperscript{14} Kent Sparks, “Genesis 49 and the Tribal List Tradition in Ancient Israel” in \textit{ZAW}, 115 (2003), 327-347
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 328
song of Deborah but earlier than other lists in prophetic writings such as Ezekiel, Joseph enjoys considerable prominence as leader among his brothers (cf. Deut. 33:13-17), Simeon is absent from the list and there is a prayer that Judah might be brought back to his people (Deut. 33:7: *and bring him to his people*). Some scholars like S. Beyerle argue that this is a prayer for Judah to be returned from exile. However, Sparks believes the content and linguistic character are much earlier than exilic times.

Several outstanding socio-anthropological studies in the last century have provided a convincing portrait of the populations which inhabited Palestine in biblical times. A. Alt argued that Israel, Philistia, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Aramean states should be seen as nation states which arose in and near Canaan after 1300 B.C.E. According to Alt, these nation states succeeded the city-states of the preceding era:

A few generations after the end of the Egyptian rule, the political map of Palestine is completely changed...the new states were all named after tribes and peoples who had played no part in the earlier history of the country, and indeed had only just settled there – Philistines, Israelites, Judeans, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Arameans. The encounter with the city-state system understandably took different forms and led to different results, according to whether a new community was built from the beginning on land that belonged to the old city-states, or whether it advanced on to their domains at a later stage.

According to Joshua not all the original inhabitants of Canaan were conquered or driven out. Joshua 9 narrates the case of the Gibeonites who were assimilated by securing a treaty with the Israelites. That the conquest was anything but a replacement or extermination of the original populations is evident from the account of Judg 1:1-2:5; 2:20-23. Apparently, even before Israel had time to settle, it had already been seduced by

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16 Cf. S. Beyerle, “Der Mosesegen im Deuteronomium”, *BAZAW* 250 (1997), 108-113
17 Sparks, 328 (footnote 4.)
the gods of the other peoples and so contravened the covenant with Yhwh. For this reason, Yhwh reneged on his promise to drive out the peoples. Judg 2:3 reads:

“Moreover, I tell you, I shall not drive them from your presence; and they shall be a snare for you and their gods will be a trap for you.”

Mario Liverani argues convincingly that the chaotic settlement narrative reflects the post-exilic situation and the relationship between returnees and remainees. Suffice it here to emphasize that the biblical narrative does indeed reflect an Israelite ‘state’ that shares its territory with non-Israelite elements: “The Deuteronomist redactor could not deny the persistence of these ‘historical’ peoples, because the evidence of the historical period during which the kings of Israel and Judah had to fight against them was too substantial and important.”

The Northern Kingdom was indeed a multifaceted state comprising a heterogeneous population: “The highlands of Samaria – the core territory of the state and the seat of the capital – was inhabited by Israelites, that is the descendants of the second millennium highlands population, pastoral and sedentary alike. In the Northern lowlands, the rural population comprised mainly of local indigenous elements, that is, Canaanites.” There is further evidence of this in the architectural styles of the two groups of people. Daniel Fleming sums up aptly when he writes: “I prefer to treat Israel as a social group, not an ethnic group, and most likely the name of a body that acted politically, especially in the sense of a unified social body in conduct of war and peace under coherent leadership.

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20 Ibid., 290
21 Finkelstein, “City-States to States”, 80
That is, early Israel is best pursued as a polity, not as an ethnicity.”

Agreeing with these scholars, this study presumes that Israel, the northern kingdom, had a population of different ethnicities.

C. THE OMRISE DYNASTY

The biblical narrative attributes the emergence of the Northern Kingdom to a rebellion spearheaded by Jeroboam the son of Nebat. However, not much is known about Jeroboam beyond the biblical record (1 Kgs 11:26ff. 12:20, 25) Omri is credited with much of the work of establishing Israel as a state:

With Omri a new epoch in the history of Palestine began. The political game took another turn. He was a very able ruler who had a clear understanding of the political scene and who succeeded in (partly) re-establishing Israel’s position as an important power.

After a period of instability characterized by coups and counter coups, Omri, a military commander, ascended the throne of Israel around 886/885 B.C.E. Despite lasting for only about half a century, the Omride dynasty made a lasting contribution to the political religious and cultural heritage of Israel.

Regarding the biblical narrative of the Omride dynasty, Gray observes that in “this section genuine historical sources are used in some detail (e.g. 20:1-34; 22 II K. 3:4-27; 6:24-7:20; 8:20-22; 9:1-10), but with prophetic adaptation and Deuteronomistic comments and notices throughout. The bulk of the sources dealing with Elijah and


23 Ahlström, The History of Ancient Palestine, 570

24 The Annals of Shalmaneser III (840 B.C.) long after Omri’s reign, refer to Israel as “the house of Omri” and to Jehu as “son of Omri”. (See James Pritchard, ANET, no. 277-281)
Elisha.” Nevertheless, there is considerable information in the brief report about Omri in 1Kgs 16:21-28. Verse 24 is particularly noteworthy: “He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built the hill and called the name of the city that he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill”

This is most probably from a royal source as it depicts the Samaria project as a personal project of the king. It is also very significant that the report, contrary to the preceding Deuteronomistic formulaic statements, makes no reference to Omri’s ancestry. Gray concludes from this, and the fact that the name “Omri” is not a typical Hebrew name, that Omri was most likely not an Israelite:

“The family of Omri is not mentioned, which lends support to the view that Omri was one of the class of professional soldiers, perhaps of alien birth, who depended on the king. Against this view is the fact that he was elected by the army in the field, which, though officered to a considerable extent by professional soldiers not necessarily of Israelite birth, was still ‘the people’, i.e. the people of Yahweh. It is not likely that they would have chosen an alien, however able. A more probable view in our opinion is that the fact that Omri’s lineage is not mentioned indicates that he was of Canaanite extraction from a community incorporated in Israel since the time of David and Solomon...In this case, the struggle between Omri and Tibni may have been a struggle between the Canaanite element in the state of Israel with their traditions of professional military service under the feudal system in the former Canaanite city-states and the Israelite element under Tibni. It is obvious, however, that Omri had the support of many Israelites also, ‘the people’ being divided. His supporters would include those Israelites assimilated to the Canaanite way of life, chiefly in the central plain. This is the only case to which the prohibition against a foreigner as king (Deut. 17:15) is relevant.”

The Omride dynasty undertook stupendous building projects not only in Samaria, but also at Jezreel, Hazor and Megiddo. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the kingdom was

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26 Gray,364. Gray, citing Alt, argues further that Omri’s selection of Samaria as capital was not accidental. Samaria was in Canaanite territory and had no known associations with Israelite traditions. It is significant that the only deity for whom provision is made in Samaria is Baal (1 Kgs 16:32). See Ibid, 366ff.
a stimulus for the monumental architectural projects. After coming out victorious from a scathing civil war involving the Tibni faction, the Omrides needed to legitimize their rule and to cement the fractures caused by the coups and counter-coups the followed the reign of Jerobam the son of Nebat.

The extrabiblical evidence suggests that Omri was a far more significant king than the superficial formulaic Deuteronomic treatment in 1 Kgs 16:23-28 suggests. Nevertheless, as Ahlström observes, “as with all kings of Israel, he is negatively evaluated because of Jeroboam I, whose ‘sin’ was to create the nation Israel. Omri’s judgment is part of the historiographer’s literary pattern. Otherwise there is no particular ‘sin’ the writer can use to tarnish the reputation of Omri who lifted Israel out of obscurity.”

D. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE NORTHERN KINGDOM DURING THE PERIOD OF THE OMRIDES

a. General Near Eastern Context

27 Ahlström, 573.
28 Ibid., 573.
It is imperative to mention at the start of this section that Israel’s faith in Yahweh developed in the context of a polytheistic Ancient Near Eastern environment. The discussion concerning the relationship between Israel’s religion and those of her Near Eastern neighbors has been characterized by two opposite views. The first view, expressed mostly by older scholars from the middle of the last century, contended that Israel’s faith was unique and significantly different from those of her neighbors. Scholars such as W.F. Albright, G.E. Wright, Y. Kaufmann, C. H. Gordon and John Bright helped shape a consensus that the religion of Israel was not just one among many, but, in a very real sense, was unique and much superior. A second view represented by a large contingent of scholars, whose works are catalogued in Thomas Römer’s latest book, *The Invention of God*, argued that Israel’s faith grew out from its contact with the Canaanites and other Near Eastern neighbors.29 Römer provides a recent overview of the cult of YHWH through various biblical texts to southern populations, including the Medianites, the Edomites and the Egyptians. He concludes that “Yhwh chose Israel at a particular point in history and that this people had not been his people from all time.”30

Various documents from Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt reflect a belief in a multiplicity of deities.31 Texts about the Ugaritic pantheon have been especially illuminating. Especially significant and relevant are El and his consort Asherah, Baal and

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29 Thomas Römer, *The Invention of God*, Translated by Raymond Geuss. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 40ff. Römer cites biblical evidence that “Yahweh came from the South”, e.g. Deut 32:2; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:8-9 and Hab 3:3. Some of these texts mention geographical locations such as “Mount Paran”, “Teman” and “Qadesh”. Other scholars who believe YHWH originated from the Canaanite environment include Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) argues that the transformation of YHWH into a unique and universal god was effected by the refusal of Judaism to call him by his name and especially by the translation of the LXX which permitted the whole world to discover and eventually acknowledge YHWH.

30 Ibid., 72.

his consort Anat, Yammu and Mot. Except for the supreme deities El and Baal, the other deities had limited spheres of influence both in terms of activity and of territory. As such, they were consulted for specific needs. The narrative about the Syrian army commander Na’am in 2 Kgs. 5, and his desire to carry back with him some earth (’àdûmâ) belonging to YHWH so he could continue to worship in YHWH’s territory, illustrates this belief that the gods had territorial boundaries. Frequent reference is also made in Near Eastern texts to deities meeting in a “divine assembly” presided by the supreme deity.\(^\text{32}\)

In such an environment, it is almost illogical to imagine that Israel was somehow cocooned from any alien influences. In the words of Kaufmann, “Israelite religion and paganism are historically related; both are stages in the religious evolution of man. Israeliite religion arose at a certain period in history, and it goes without saying that its rise did not take place in a vacuum. The Israeliite tribes were heirs to a religious tradition which can only have been polytheistic.”\(^\text{33}\)

There is a growing recognition by scholars of a certain disconnect between the religious beliefs and practices of the majority ordinary Israelites and what has been termed “Book religion.”\(^\text{34}\) Susan Ackerman argued that popular religion, from the perspective of the canonical texts, was the religion of the ignorant, superstitious masses. Ironically, this represented the mainstream in their day:

\(^{32}\) The biblical narrative pictures YHWH in council or divine assembly especially in narratives of mythological nature See, for instance, Gen 1:26; Job 1; and Ps. 82:1ff.


\(^{34}\) See William G. Dever, *Did God have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 90ff. See also Karel van der Toorn, *The Image and the Book: Iconic cults, Aniconism, and the rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1997) While Dever agrees with the distinction, he believes that for the majority illiterate Israeliite population who did not yet have the Book and could not read, such religion was unknown.
“It is not the religion of the Deuteronomistic school, the priests, or the prophets, the three groups from whom the majority of our biblical texts have come and the three groups who are the most influential in defining what biblical religion is.”

b. The Yahweh Cult

The meaning of the divine name Yhwh is still shrouded in mystery. The attempt to interpret the name in Exod 3:14-15 is not much of a help. In response to Moses’ quest, the deity replies, “I am who I am”, which has been interpreted as a form of the Hebrew verb “hyh” (to be). The LXX certainly understands it in terms of being, and therefore interprets, evgw, eivmi o` w;n (“I am the Being”).

The biblical narrative concedes that Yhwh was known and worshipped by other names such as El, Elohim, and El-Shaddai. The tetragrammaton, YHWH, which has been variously vocalized, appears to be the personal name of Israel’s god. Nevertheless, after centuries of speculation, research and study, the question of the origins of the name ‘YHWH’ and the cult around it remains a matter of vigorous contention. Like all religious phenomena, the cult of YHWH underwent a gradual historical evolution exhibiting significant changes occasioned by both internal and external influences. An analysis of the biblical narratives reveals a vast diversity of attributes and this has led some scholars to suggest that different strands or manifestations of the YHWH cult coalesced, undergoing some form of purification in the process. Some scholars believe YHWH was a Canaanite deity adopted by the Israelites and adapted to speak to their unique history and heritage. Brousseau stated, “among the Canaanite Pantheon of gods

35 Susan Ackerman, Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1
The Patriarchs chose to worship the Creator-god of the heavens and earth, El. This same El was the god that Jacob worshipped a BETH-EL, that is the House of El, Gen 28:19.36

The earliest West Semitic text that mentions YHWH is the Stele of the Moabite king, Mesha. Mesha boasts of his conquest of Nebo from Israel and YHWH at the instance of his god, Chemosh. The significance of this evidence is that it testifies that Yahweh was the official cultic deity of Israel in the same way that Chemosh was the national deity of Moab. Some texts suggest that YHWH was worshipped in Edom and Midian before his cult arrived in Palestine; two Egyptian texts from the 14th and 13th centuries seem to mention YHWH.37 In these texts, YHWH is not connected with the Israelites nor his cult located in Palestine. The documents speak of Yahu in the land of Shosu-beduins. From this evidence, scholars such as Cornelis Tiele conclude that before YHWH arrived in Palestine, he was worshipped by groups of Edomites and Medianites.38 This would agree with some ancient theophanic passages of the northern tradition which portray YHWH coming from Edom and Seir, Teman and Mt. Paran (cf. Judg 5:4; Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3) An inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud gives extra-biblical witness to YHWH’s connection to this geographical area. In a study in 1872, Tiele argued that YHWH was a god of the desert, worshipped by the Kenites long before the Israelites came to adopt him. This Kenite-Medianite hypothesis traces YHWH’s origins through

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36 Gerard Brousseau, “The Sources and Development of High Place Worship (Bamah) of Israel” (doctoral diss., Universität München,1968), 184
37 See Michael C. Astour, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographic Lists” in Manfred Görg, (ed) Festschrift Elmar Edel (Bamberg: AAT, 1979) 19ff. Astour notes two hieroglyphic references from the New Kingdom period which mention the “land of Shasu of Yahweh”. He suggests that there is a third likely use of the name Yahweh in the Medinet Habu topographical lists of Ramses III in the early 12th century BC
38 Cornelis Tiele’s study entitled Vergelijkende geschiedenis van de Egyptische en Mesopotamische godsdiensten was published in Amsterdam in 1872. Tiele’s idea was further elaborated by B. Stade. The Kenite hypothesis came to enjoy considerable support from such scholars as A.J. Wensinck, H. H. Rowley, W. H. Schmidt and Mettinger.
Moses to his father-in-law Hobab, a Medianite priest (see Exod 2:16; 3:1 18:1Judg 1:16; 4:11; Num 10:29). It is believed that the Kenites were a branch of the Medianites. K. van der Toorn believes this hypothesis is plausible on several grounds. Besides explaining the absence of YHWH in the West-Semitic epigraphic data, it also explains the positive evaluation of the Kenites in the biblical texts and YHWH’s topographical link with the area of Edom.\textsuperscript{39} Van der Toorn, however, admits that the Kenite hypothesis has its weaknesses. Any theory that relies heavily on Moses as a historical figure rests on shaky foundations. Moreover, the hypothesis disregards the Canaanite origins of Israel since it suggests that the Israelites became Yahwists under the influence of Moses as they made their way to Canaan. Van der Toorn suggests that, although it is plausible that the Israelites adopted the YHWH cult from the Kenites, it is unlikely that the process occurred outside Palestine. “Both Kenites and Rechabites are mentioned as dwelling in North Israel at an early stage; so are the Gibeonites who are ethnically related to the Edomites.”\textsuperscript{40}

In the last century, many scholars including notables like W.F. Albright and G. Fohrer argued that Israel had a distinctive monotheistic faith from very early times:

“Monotheism formed an essential part of Mosaic religion from the beginning. Mosaic monotheism like that of the following centuries (at least down to the seventh century B.C.E.) was empirico-logical; it was practical and implicit rather than intellectual and explicit.” \textsuperscript{41} Fohrer believes that various groups, tribes or clans of Israelites with different versions of Yahwism gradually merged: “Thus one tribe after the other came to accept

\textsuperscript{39} Karel van der Toorn, “Yahweh” in van der Toorn, Becking, and van der Horst, 1716
\textsuperscript{40} van der Toorn, “Yahweh”, 1716
\textsuperscript{41} William Foxwell Albright, \textit{Archaeology and the Religion of Israel}. First Published in 1942 by The John Hopkins Press (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006),177
Yahwism: through its introduction as a tribal religion (central Palestine), as a consequence of sudden conviction following unexpected victory (northern Palestine), or by gradual extension from clan to clan and from city to city.” Fohrer goes on to argue that this “consolidated” version of Yahwism then confronted the Canaanite religion in a protracted rivalry that continued throughout the period of the monarchy. This conflict was inevitable: The Israelites “could not attain the achievements and of settled civilization and use the new language they had adopted without also sharing the thoughts and experiences on which they were nurtured. The new way of life was intimately associated with the ideas and conduct the Israelites found among the indigenous population. Inescapably they began to approximate the Canaanite way of life, cultic practices, and religious background.” Indeed, some scholars from as early as the nineteenth century argued that YHWH was a Canaanite deity adopted by the Israelites after the settlement. It should be noted that Fohrer followed the biblical timeline and consequently believed, contrary to a growing chorus of scholarly voices today, that Yahwism was a monotheistic faith at this time.

Jeremy M. Hutton has made a strong case for a fresh look at the interpretation of

43 Ibid., 103.
44 See von Bohlen *Introduction to the Book of Genesis with Commentary on the First Portion*, vol. 1, (London: Chapman, 1855), 140ff. Colenso *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1862) and Goldziher *Der Mythus bei den Hebräern und seine geschichliche Entwicklung: Untersuchungen zur Mythologie und Religionswissenschat*, (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1876), 327ff. With varying emphasis, these scholars argue that the Yahweh cult could not have been anything other than a Canaanite deity adopted by the Hebrews with other aspects of Canaanite civilization.
45 W.F. Albright, like Fohrer, believed that Israel’s religion was distinct from its neighbors by its moral and intellectual superiority. He was unrelenting in his believe that Israelite monotheism dates back to the era of Moses. For Albright’s views, see Albright, *Archaeology and Religion of Israel*, 95ff. More recent scholars such as Mario Liverani, Patrick Miller, Israel Finkelstein, Thomas Römer argue for an emerging monotheism that reaches clarity only in the exilic or post-exilic period.
the “oneness” of YHWH as expressed in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4) in the light of the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. He argues that the expressions “YHWH of Teman” and “YHWH of Samaria” the manifestations of YHWH at these localities and the cult surrounding such manifestations were officially sanctioned. He postulates that,

> the boundaries defining sacred space were fluid. These boundaries could be permeated by other manifestations of the same deity to whom the shrine was dedicated, even if they were in ‘competition’ with the ‘host’ manifestation. In this regard, competition did not necessarily comprise an active battle between the two (as in 1Kings 18), but rather consisted in the standing choice offered to patrons when deciding the object of their devotion.\(^47\)

**c. The Baal Cult**

The Deuteronomistic Historian opens his account of Ahab’s reign with a summary condemnation claiming that it was precisely Ahab’s Sidonian wife Jezebel who introduced Baal worship into Israel (1 Kgs 16:29-34). The narratives about Jezebel and Ahab do indeed mention Baal and Asherah without further specifications. Considering that there were many *ba’alim* prominent in the pantheon of Tyre-Sidon, the debate about which particular Baal is referred to in these accounts, has occupied the attention of scholars in the last couple of centuries. The discovery of the Ugaritic texts between 1928-94 enabled scholars to shed further light on the Baal cult. Roland de Vaux was the first to make a good case for identifying the Baal of 1Kings 18 with Baal Melqart, in the light of available evidence.\(^48\) According to him *Melqart* actually means “king of the city” and city is a reference to the Netherworld, not Tyre. He argues that Melqart is a vegetation deity

\(^{47}\) Ibid.,178  
who is awakened from his summer hibernation by a Spring festival. A second suggestion regarding the identity of Baal in 1 Kings was made by K. Galling who argued that Baal Carmel mentioned in Roman documents, is the Baal in these narratives. This argument seems more problematic not just because of the late date of its sources but most especially because it fails to emphasize the foreign origins of Baal. A third opinion held by O. Eiβfeldt argued that for almost two thousand years from the end of the second millennium B.C.E, Baalshamem flourished. He further reasoned that Baalshamem was the personal deity of Jezebel because of its universal appeal and individual characteristics. Moreover, this Tyrian deity could have been worshipped locally as Baal Carmel. A fourth view is to identify the Baal of the narratives of the books of Kings with the Storm-god of the Ugaritic texts. This immediately raises the question of the time difference. Which characteristics of the Storm-god changed and which persisted in the intervening centuries? It is evident from the narratives in 1 Kings 17-19 that certain motifs are highlighted: “A vegetation and storm god would be able to reappear annually from his hibernation to start the spring rains, but, according to 1 Kings 17-19 a drought occurred for years (1 Kings 17:1). This demonstrated according to the narrative, the impotency of the storm god to reappear.” Patricia Berlyn identifies this Baal as Baal Hadad. She argued that the two ba’alim, Hadad and Melqart would have special

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49 Although de Vaux cites a rather late Josephus source in his argument, it is reasoned that Josephus used older sources. Moreover, scholars such as R.A. Oden Jr. has argued that the Canaanite religion which endured till the Christian era is identical to that described in the texts of Ugarit (See R.A. Oden, “The Persistence of Canaanite Religion” in BA, 39 (March, 1976), 31-36) 50 Cf. K. Gall, “Der Gott Karmel und die Ächtung der fremdem Götter”, in G. Ebeling, Geschichte und Altes Testament:Festschrift A.Alt zum 70 Geburstag (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1953) 105-125.
51 Cf. O. Eiβfeldt, “Ba’alšamēm und Jahwe.” Kleine Schriften, II (1963), 171-198
attraction to Jezebel. The first, Baal Hadad, was prominent in Northwest Semitic mythology and is referred to simply as Baal in the Ugaritic texts, without further specification. It was common for his devotees to fall into ecstasy and call out “Baal Zevul”, that is “Baal is lord.” Berlyn believes the word “zevul” is a theophoric element that forms part of Jezebel’s name.\textsuperscript{54} This is obscured by the narrator’s transliteration of Jezebel’s name from the original Phoenician to Hebrew. Melqart, as mentioned earlier, was “king of the city”. He was the tutelary god of Tyre and some of his clergy were referred to as “Rousers of the God.” This will explain Elijah’s mockery of the Baal prophets on Carmel:

“Cry in a loud voice! Since he is a god, he is either attending to business, or having a bowel movement, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” (1Kgs. 18:27)

Whatever the identity of the Baal in the narratives of the books of Kings, Israel was already, in truth, Baal territory. Walther Zimmerli has suggested that the relationship between Yahweh and Baal was characterized by three phases: first, some Israelites served both YHWH, the god of the Exodus, and Baal, the vegetation god; second, many Israelites formed a syncretistic religion in which the attributes and powers of YHWH and Baal were fused; finally, there were Israelites who, like Elijah, fought against any Baalistic tendencies.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, the northern kingdom was home to a variety of deities.

“In Samaria and throughout Israel reigned a religious pluralism that was later to be represented as a struggle between the popular, national god YHWH and the foreign deity Baal who predominated at court. However, Baal did not need to be ‘imported’ by the Phoenician Jezebel. . . Baal was the traditional god (or better the god-type) of the countryside along with the goddesses Astarte and Asherah.”\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{55} See Walther Zimmerli, \textit{Grundriß der alttestamentlichen theologie} (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972), 56ff.
\textsuperscript{56} Liverani, 119.
d. The cult of Asherah

There are two basic interpretations regarding the identity and nature of Asherah. Before the Ras Shamra documents were found, the majority of scholars, following the biblical narrative, believed Asherah was some type of a cultic object: a wooden image, a sanctuary or shrine, or even a tree. The second view, that Asherah is actually the name of a goddess, the consort of Baal, was reinforced by discovery of the Ras Shamra tablets in 1928. Since the publication of the Ras Shamra texts, the identity and nature of Asherah is much clearer. From these texts, we can positively say that “she is Lady Asherah of the Day (or of the Sea), the creatress of gods, and she is one of the wet-nurses (of the gods) . . .”\(^{57}\) It is also possible to conclude that she was the consort of El, even if the texts do not directly say so. The discovery of more documents from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, near Kadesh-barnea, and Khirbet el-Qom, revealed a strong connection between Asherah and YHWH. One of the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud reads: brkt. ’tkm.ljhwh.šmrn wlʾšrth (I have blessed you by YHWH šmrn and his Asherah) The rendering of šmrn was initially problematic. A study of comparative inscriptions lead to the conclusion that šmrn is the city name ‘Samaria’ much like the inscription, jhwh tnn wʾšrth which qualifies YHWH with a geographic location, Teman.\(^{58}\) From the evidence of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, M. Gilula argued that there were two YHWH traditions. The first centered at Shiloh, invoked YHWH by the title jhwh šʿbaʿôt (YHWH of “hosts”). The second was “YHWH of Samaria” who was worshipped by the northern tribes. After considering the evidence,

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\(^{57}\) Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Godesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament*. JSOTSup. 232 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 90

J.A. Emerton concludes that:

(It) would not be surprising if Yhwh was thought to have a wife in some kinds of popular religion – or, indeed, in some forms of official religion. The Old Testament contains polemic against Astarte and Asherah, and the latter is mentioned in connexion, not only with an altar of Baal (Jdc 6:25-30), but also with Yahweh’s altar (Dtn 16:21), and is even installed in the Jerusalem temple and has to be removed in a reformation (I Reg 15.13, II Reg 18.4, 21.7, 23.4,6,7) There is no difficulty in supposing that Asherah may have been the wife of Yahweh in such a syncretistic cult, just as Athirat was the wife of El in the Ugaritic pantheon.59

In *Did God Have a Wife?*, Dever reconstructs the practice of religion in ancient Israel from the bottom up. Archaeological excavations reveal numerous local and family shrines, where sacrifices and other rituals were carried out.60 Intrigued by this folk religion in all its variety and vitality, Dever highlights the importance of distinguishing between ‘folk religion’, that is, religion as the lived everyday experience of common ordinary people in ancient Israel, and the “minority report” contained in the Deuteronomistic redaction. Dever examined and interpreted the prominent inscriptions, symbols, vessels and figurines recovered from various archaeological sites and concluded that the presence and influence of the cult of Asherah in Israel, Judah and their Canaanite neighbors is incontrovertible. Moreover, he believed Asherah was not just a symbol or a tree. She was a popular and revered goddess who was credited as the source of such blessings as wellbeing and fertility. He decries the fact that Asherah is reviled by the authors of the Hebrew Bible as a foreign deity, for indeed she was at home in 10th-8th century Israel as the consort of YHWH. Tilde Binger, after studying the inscriptions from Khirbet el-Qom, similarly acknowledges: “it must be supposed that Asherah was indeed a

59 Ibid.,13  
60 Dever, 5.
goddess, and the consort of Yahweh. Dever comes to a similar conclusion when he writes:

It seems clear that originally in ancient Israel there was a Goddess named ‘Asherah’, who was associated with living trees and hilltop forest sanctuaries, and who could sometimes be symbolized by a wooden pole or an image of a tree.

It is significant to note that these inscriptions date from the 10th - 8th centuries B.C. and therefore coincide with the period of the Omri dynasty. The overarching conclusion is that of a very fertile religious environment in which folk religion was vibrant and the diversity of deities and cultic practices was considered a treasure and not shunned or condemned. Although YHWH may have been recognized by many as a national deity, there does not seem to have been any determination of orthodoxy at this time. For the Israelites of this epoch, multiplicity of deities was a blessing rather than a curse. It is also noteworthy that this was not a phenomenon limited to the northern kingdom, Israel. There is biblical evidence that, as late as the time of Hezekiah even in the Jerusalem temple, there was the figure of Asherah (2 Kings 21:7).

e. Bamoth

The Hebrew word *bamah* has a variety of meanings both, cultic and non-cultic. The non-cultic references range from, “heights/raised ground”, “back of enemies”, “tops of clouds”, or “crest of waves”. In the cultic context, it refers to a variety of cultic objects, both natural and artificial. These include “sacred rock”, “sacred raised ground/mount”, and a variety of sacred altars or shrines built by men, (cf. 1 Kgs 11:7; 61

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61 Binger, *Asherah*, 109
62 Dever, 102
14:23; 2 Kgs 17:9; 21:3 and Jer 19:5). Dever defines the *bamah* as “a specific type of public cult-place, usually open-air, and typically prominently located.” The *Matsebah*, a commemorative stone set up in an upright posture for cultic use, is also a form of bamah. It is believed that it was usually set up as a testimony to an alliance or an undertaking (Gen 31:45,51-52; Exod 24:4; Isa 19:20) R. de Vaux suggests that the *matsebah* was the symbol of the male deity just as the *asherah* represented the female deities. This view is based on the belief that the asherah was a cultic object or symbol and not a deity. De Vaux’s suggestion appears to obscure the significance of the pairing of Baal and Asherah or YHWH and Asherah as found in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud.

There is no denying the fact that the cultic bamoth were commonly used in the period of the monarchy in both Israel and Judah. Several bamoth have been uncovered by numerous archaeological sites in the northern kingdom such as Tel-Dan and Nahariyah, near Haifa. It has been suggested that the Bamoth were a relic of the Canaanite religion which the Israelites adopted. This is, indeed, the picture painted by some biblical passages. “In these passages the *bāmôt* are uniformly condemned, of course. Jeroboam, the northern kingdom’s first king, is castigated for setting up “golden calves” at high places at Bethel in the south (an old cult center) and at Dan in the north, where incense was burned (I Kings 12:28-31; II Chronicles 11:15).” High places thrived consistently in Judah as well. Indeed, the only kings spared the wrath of the Deuteronomic redactors because they tore down the high places, are Hezekiah and Josiah (II Kgs 18:3-4; 23:4ff.). Ironically, in the early period of the monarchy, prophet and king used high places for

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63 Ibid., 93
65 Dever, 93.
cultic purposes and are not condemned (cf. 1 Sam 9:5-14; 10:1-5). 1 Kings 3:2 attempts to justify this with a revealing parenthetical note: “Only, the people were sacrificing on the bāmōt because no Temple had yet been built to the name of the Lord during those days.” This is an interesting note because it is an admission by the redactors of being removed, at least in time, from the events they describe. They also admit to knowledge of the Temple, and of cultic adaptations after it was built. It would be fair to say that, for the redactors, high places were legitimate places of worship when the temple was not yet built.

In his dissertation, Brousseau traced the Hebrew origins of the word “Bamah” and concluded that the word is usually, though not always, used with a cultic meaning. Brousseau’s study is significant as it exposed a fertile environment of religious diversity and a treasure of cultic material ranging from deities and places of worship, to cultic objects. This impressive study portrays an environment of religious syncretism in Palestine and the surrounding regions in biblical times. Brousseau traced the close relationship between Israelite religion and that of other peoples of the Ancient Near East. He concludes that “Jeroboam, for example, did not necessarily initiate a corrupt cult with his golden calves in Dan and Bethel, because Yahweh could legitimately be worshipped under the symbol of a calf, though such a symbol did naturally lend itself to a greater danger of becoming idolatry.”

In a 2007 article entitled, “Yahweh versus the Canaanite Gods: Polemic in Judges and 1Samuel 1-7”, Robert Chisholm Jr. argued that the book of Judges together with 1Samuel 1-7 is basically an apology for YHWH against the Canaanite deities and the

66 Brousseau, 216
Philistine god, Dagon. The study focuses on Israel’s frequent apostasy and the resulting consequences. This study similarly confirms that the Israelites were spoiled for choice with respect to deities and objects of worship from the early days of the settlement.

The Deuteronomic Historian’s depiction of Ahab as a patron of the Baal cult to the detriment of Yahwism is a misrepresentation of the religious situation during the reign of Ahab. All the religious activities attributed to Ahab were indeed a part of the official Yahwistic cult of the northern kingdom which was different from that Judah. “In the north, the state cult readily embraced not only Canaanite religious customs that had long since come to be regarded as native Israelite in folk religion.” That Ahab, like all the kings of Israel, was a worshipper of YHWH is evident from the Yahwistic theophoric names of his children: Ahaziah, Joram and Athaliah. Many scholars believe that the construction of a Baal temple in Samaria does not mean that Ahab abandoned YHWH in favor of Baal. It was not unheard of for an Israeliite king to provide his foreign wife with a shrine for her deities. The case of Solomon is vividly narrated in 1 Kgs 11:7-8:

7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.

The fact that the practice is condemned by the Deuteronomic Historian writing in a changed historical context several centuries after Solomon does not refute the evidentiary value of this record. Moreover, some commentators believe Omri had Canaanite ancestry and for this reason, the Omrides “wished to provide a shrine for the Canaanite population

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67 Robert B. Chisholm Jr.’s article is published in BSac, 164 (April-June, 2007), 165-80.
68 Dever, 281
69 Some biblical texts refer to Athaliah as the daughter of Omri and, therefore, a sister of Ahab, cf. 2Kgs 8:26; 2Chron 22:2.
70 See Finkelstein, The Forgotten Kingdom, 139ff.
of the northern kingdom, and it is in this context that the move to establish a Baal cult in Samaria is to be understood."\textsuperscript{71}

Historians such as Ahlström, have noted that the Elijah-Elijah stories refer to a period later than the time of Ahab. The Deuteronomic Historian would have used them in this context for the sole purpose of devaluing Ahab and attributing his apostasy to the influence of his Phoenician wife. The stories were redacted to depict Ahab and his house as Baal worshippers.\textsuperscript{72} This view will explain the baffling absence and silence of Jezebel in the crucial narrative of Elijah’s battle against the Baal cult in 1 Kings 18.\textsuperscript{73}

In the light of the archaeological evidence, we can confidently state that the practice of religion in 9\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} century Israel was not as the biblical text portrays. The evidence indicates folk religion was a fluid phenomenon, there was a multiplicity of deities invoked in diverse ways by their patrons. While the evidence indicates that there was the cult of YHWH in Samaria, it confirms in the same breath that this deity was also associated with Asherah who is condemned as a foreign influence in the biblical narrative. The evidence shows that YHWH, Baal and Asherah were all acknowledged and worshipped without let or hindrance. Indeed, when the Assyrians conquered Israel, their spoil included many deities. “Regardless of the identity of the deities that were worshipped in the northern shrines…in the ninth century, cult had not yet been centralized, seemingly not even at a given site. Archaeological evidence of cult at


\textsuperscript{72} See Ahlström, 585ff.

\textsuperscript{73} In the narrative of this crucial contest on Camel between Yahweh and Baal, Jezebel is only mentioned twice in parenthetical statements referring to her previous persecution of Prophets of Yahweh (1Kgs 18:13,19)
Samaria is lacking, and the same holds true for Jezreel.”

E. THE FALL OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

Omri’s successful reign was largely due to the absence of powerful external enemies. Egypt was by now a spent force and Assyria was just beginning to marshal its resources and begin to flex its muscles. Omri’s smart alliance with Phoenicia also meant that Israel had an ally to call on when it needed help. The relationship with Judah was similarly cordial. These conditions were to change rapidly.

In the second half of the ninth century, Assyria began an ambitious campaign of expansion by conquest and annexation. Shalmaneser III conducted several campaigns against Damascus, Hamath, and Israel, at the famous battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C.E. By 841 B.C.E. Israel had been subdued by Assyria and Jehu was forced to pay tribute to Shalmaneser III. Similarly, in 800, Jehoash paid tribute to Ada-Nirari III. During this period, the Assyrians were content with receiving tribute from these states and did not push for annexation. Internal crisis delayed Assyria’s campaign of expansion in the first half of the eighth century. Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in 744 B.C.E. and despite continuing internal strife, resumed the campaign of expansion.

The decline and fall of Israel began soon after the reign of Jeroboam II. Menahem (743-738 B.C.E.) took advantage of the internal crisis to execute a coup and usurp the throne. He immediately paid tribute to Tiglath-Pileser to confirm Israel’s vassal status

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Finkelstein, The Forgotten Kingdom, 115. Note that Finkelstein also believes that Samaria had a royal YHWH shrine in the ninth century and that this is what is polemically characterized as a Baal temple in 1 Kgs 16:32. He argues that the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud which mention “Yahweh of Samaria” hints at a royal YHWH shrine at Samaria (see page 139)
and to stay Assyria’s wrath, albeit temporarily. The situation went rapidly downhill from this point. Menahem’s son Pekahiah was assassinated by a usurper named Pekah. Pekah joined forces with Damascus and besieged Jerusalem in the days of Ahaz. Ahaz appealed to Assyria for protection. Assyria was only too glad to oblige. Tiglath-Pileser invaded the northern kingdom Israel, easily taking much of Galilee. He did not conquer Samaria at this time but was content with sponsoring a coup against Pekah. The leader of the coup, Hoshea, reigned over a much reduced state comprising the territories Ephraim and Manasseh. The Assyrians created provinces in the remainder of the state. Tiglath-Pileser III died in 727 B.C.E. some vassals saw an opportunity to assert their independence. Hoshea solicited Egyptian protection and refused to pay tribute to Assyria. Assyria reacted swiftly, besieging Samaria and taking Hoshea prisoner. In the meantime, Tiglath-Pileser was succeeded by Shalmaneser V. The conquest is completed by his successor, Sargon II. About 27,290 inhabitants of Samaria were deported to other parts of the Assyrian kingdom and these were replaced by deportees from other conquered lands.\textsuperscript{75}

Archaeological findings suggest a dramatic increase in the population of Jerusalem and its environs in the latter part of Iron Age II. Finkelstein has suggested that this extraordinary development could not be attributed to natural population growth since Jerusalem and Judah as a whole had no economic appeal that could explain such a development. Meanwhile archaeological finds also testify to the appearance of material culture of northern traits such as olive-oil installations, burial traditions and certain pottery types. Finkelstein suggests that biblical texts believed to be of northern provenance in the Judah-dominated biblical text should also be considered as northern

\textsuperscript{75} See Ahlström, 669ff.
‘artifacts’ that migrated to the south, possibly in the late eighth century B.C.E.:

All these indicate a major population shift in the hill country over a short period of time in the second half of the eighth century. The only possible reason for this is the fall of the northern kingdom and the resettlement of Israelite groups from the area of southern Samaria, including Bethel, in Jerusalem and Judah. Judah was consequently transformed from an isolated, clan-based homogeneous society into a mixed Judahite-Israelite kingdom under Assyrian domination.76

This forged a Pan-Israelite identity and history from different, sometimes irreconcilable, traditions. The central concept of this new Pan-Israelite identity was the Davidic dynasty and the exclusivity of the Jerusalem temple.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed recent scholarship on the socio-political and religious environment of the northern kingdom, Israel around the period of the Omrides. Historical and archaeological findings suggest that the religious, ethnic and cultural setting was far different from what emerges from the Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of the northern kingdom of this period. Between the end of the northern kingdom and the final post-exilic Deuteronomic redaction, a period of more than two centuries, the entity ‘Israel’ and the peoples who considered themselves Israelites, had changed significantly.

First, the northern kingdom Israel, in all its history, never attained a monotheistic faith. YHWH was one of two major deities competing for the allegiance of the people composed of Israelites and Canaanites. The Baal cult, the second major deity, was equally native to the northern kingdom and enjoyed a substantial following. Moreover,

76 Finkelstein, The Forgotten Kingdom, 155
besides YHWH and Baal, there was the cult of Asherah which, contrary to the image portrayed in the Deuteronomic redaction, has been confirmed as a goddess who was frequently paired with both YHWH and Baal. What has been described as folk religion by scholars such as Dever, Ackerman and van der Toorn, flourished during this period. Jezebel’s enthusiasm for the Baal cult was, in this environment, a blessing for the people of the land. Her patronage of Baal and Asherah, the deities she had grown up worshipping, would be interpreted as piety. The people of the northern kingdom were at liberty to adopt whichever deity served them best. Most people would have served several deities since deities were believed to have areas of influence both territorially and in the field of events.

Second, the northern kingdom was a multi-ethnic society. Various Canaanite and Israelite tribes were at home in the Israel of the Omrides. We have noted the suggestion by some scholars that the Omrides may have been of Canaanite ancestry themselves. At this stage in the history of Israel, ethnic diversity did not pose a problem. Indeed, Israel was more of a social group rather than an ethnic polity. The deportations and mixing of populations, following the Assyrian conquest, would have introduced unfamiliar groups into both Israel and Judah and thus created suspicion and animosity, leading to exclusivist tendencies. This is evident from picture of syncretism painted by the Deuteronomic Historian’s conclusion regarding the northern kingdom in 2 Kings 17:

>“24 And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuttah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. They inherited Samaria and dwelled in her cities… 29 Each nation made his gods and set them up in the temples on the high places which the Samarians had made, each nation in the cities in

77 See Fleming, 20.
which they dwelled… While they feared the Lord, they also served their gods according to the custom of the nations from which they were exiled… While these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols, and also their children, and their children’s children did like their fathers. They are doing the same to this day.” (2 Kgs 17:24, 29, 33, 41)

Finally, there can be little doubt that the culture of royalty evolved over time. This is especially evident when one considers the gradual evolution, in Israel, of the very concept of kingship and of the king’s relationship with the deity. In Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king was regarded as divine and accorded divine privileges. It does not appear that Israel ever elevated its king to the status of deity although the king is explicitly referred to as “son of God” in both Psalms 2 and 89, and in the passage narrating the divine promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Other passages such as Psalms 45 and 110 seem to attribute divinity to the king. The scholarly debate on the interpretation of these texts has been lively and will likely go on for a while. The accounts of the institution of the monarchy in 1 Sam. 8-12 suggest that kingship is alien to Israel. Therefore, it may be concluded that, as is true of other social institutions, Israel borrowed the concept of kingship from her Near Eastern neighbors. Originally, the concept may have been adopted wholesale with implications of divinity. The prerogatives of the king outlined in 1 Sam. 8 confirms the initial abuses associated with this foreign concept.

It has been suggested that Israel’s monarchy at the time of the Omrides was an agrarian monarchy. According to Dutcher-Walls:

The position of the queen in an agrarian monarchy carries with it the same status and wealth in the social structure as that of king. Standing at the top of the redistributive economic structures, the queen or consorts of the king would have access to all the luxuries and privileges of the royal court. In

78 For further reading on the debate about the divinity of the king in Israel see Adele Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 1-24.
some cases, a queen would also manage the royal household, which involved economic and administrative decision making. And while the king in most cases was actually the ruler, his wife or wives could, depending on the ability of the queen and the structures of the court, wield influence over the king and his advisers.  

While Dutcher-Walls admits to the conjectural nature of conclusions from sociological analysis, it is fair to suggest that in such a context, Jezebel’s apparent display of power will be considered normal and acceptable behavior. Moreover, with the volume of commerce between Israel and Phoenicia, it may be safely concluded that “at the time of Jezebel’s marriage to Ahab, she went to a new homeland that was already familiar with Phoenician goods and customs.”

The story of the northern kingdom, Israel, which was claimed by the Deuteronomic Historian more than two centuries after fall of Samaria, has been reinterpreted and nationalized in Judah. The Deuteronomic Historian’s construction of a pan-Israel narrative could never be seamless. For as Na‘aman observes, Israel and Judah were different by their religious, ethnic and cultural heritages:

“The Northern Kingdom was a multifaceted state, comprising heterogeneous population of diversified ethnic origin and cultic and cultural traditions, including many descendants of the former Canaanite population. No wonder, therefore, that it absorbed many religious concepts and cultic and cultural elements of Canaanite origin. Moreover, Israel bordered culturally influential kingdoms such as Aram Damascus and Tyre, and gradually absorbed cultic and cultural elements from its neighbours. Judah, on the other hand, was demographically quite homogeneous, made up of settled local groups with pastoral roots. It was much more isolated, having a common border with only the two continental Philistine kingdoms of Ekron and Gath. Well until the 8th century, it lagged in all aspects of state organization and urban culture far

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behind its northern neighbor.\textsuperscript{81}

Understandably, while Jezebel was at home in the 9\textsuperscript{th} century northern kingdom of Israel, the reinterpretation of her story in a significantly different context in 6\textsuperscript{th} or 5\textsuperscript{th} century Persian Judah resulted in her being defamed, denigrated and alienated.

\textsuperscript{81}Na'am\textsuperscript{1},15. See also Finkelstein’s article, “State Formation in Israel and Judah: A Contrast in Context, a Contrast in Trajectory” in Near Eastern Archaeology, 62 (1999), 39-44.
CHAPTER THREE:
THE EMERGENCE OF EXCLUSIVISM IN POST-EXILIC
JUDAH AND THE ALIENATION OF JEZEBEL

A. Introduction
B. Emergence of Monotheism: Yahweh Alone
C. Ethnocentrism: Returnees, Remainees and Foreigners
D. The Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Israelite Identity

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the post-exilic situation of Judah focusing on the socio-religious and cultural currents behind the Deuteronomic redaction of Israel’s history and the construction of a new Israelite identity. It overviews the religious, social and cultural environment in the Persian era which precipitated a crisis of identity which in turn motivated the final Deuteronomic redaction. The transformation of the Judean society began much earlier:

The material evidence from across the region strongly suggests that the Judah of the long seventh century was profoundly affected by the widespread political, social and economic changes wrought by the Assyrian imperial context. Merchants and immigrants from the Transjordanian territories and the Philistine coastal plain were regular features of many Judahite sites from the end of the eighth century onward, while Judah’s own inhabitants left witness to their far-flung trading activities at sites across the region. No longer was Judah a sheltered shadow state, its population and its affairs hidden behind the dominant northern kingdom: welcome or not, the outside world had arrived.¹

Based upon current scholarship, this dissertation assumes that the final redaction of the Deuteronomic History, including the Jezebel story, occurred in the post-exilic environment. This chapter will review some of the significant changes that occurred in

¹ C. L. Crouch, *The Making of Israel*, VTSup, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 82
the Judahite society leading to an identity crisis and exclusionism. Under the shadow of the imperial powers, and confronted by an increasingly diverse society, the Deuteronomic scribes re-conceptualized Israel and reinterpreted its history accordingly.

Essentially, the original theory of Martin Noth as espoused in his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* argues that the biblical books from Joshua to 2 Kings are a unified and coherent work of a single editor during the Babylonian occupation of Judah. This editor was also, to some degree, an author since while using various pre-composed sources, he shaped them with his own compositions to give an interpretational direction to Israel’s history. According to Noth, the book of Deuteronomy provides a hermeneutical key and the ideological basis for Deuteronomic History. Noth’s theory has undergone modifications through the years. Noth himself had already observed the existence of two or even many hands in the redactional process.

Frank Moore Cross argued for two editorial movements based on theological tensions in the narrative. Cross advocated an initial Josianic Deuteronomic redaction which was later updated and completed after the fall of Judah. Rudolf Smend, a student of Noth, and the Göttingen school, acknowledged that some Deuteronomic texts are composite. Rudolf

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3 According to Noth, the end of the Deuteronomic History is 2 Kgs 25:27-30 which records the release of Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison. This event is normally dated to 562 B.C.E and Noth believes Deuteronomic History was composed shortly afterwards, about 560 B.C.E.

4 See F. M. Cross’s article, “The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History” in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* by F. M. Cross (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) 274-89. Cross insists that theme of the divine promise of an everlasting dynasty to David (2Sam 7) written in typically Deuteronomic style is difficult to fit into the situation of Judah and its monarchy after 587 B.C.E.
Smend,\(^5\) followed by Walter Dietrich\(^6\) and Timo Veijola,\(^7\) concluded that there were multiple Exilic redactions.\(^8\) More recently, John Van Seters\(^9\) and Steve L. McKenzie\(^10\) have argued, with modifications, for a return to Noth’s concept of a single exilic author Jon Berquist makes a compelling argument for dating the final compilation of the Deuteronomic History in the Persian period (538-333 B.C.E). In his view, in the context of this period, “this compilation of literature functions not as historical reminiscence that asks questions of ‘who were we?’ or ‘how can we restore the prior glories?’ but instead operates as a construction of identity, asking the question, ‘who are the Yehudites?’”\(^11\) A detailed examination of the arguments about the number of redactions and the nature of the sources used by the Deuteronomic Historian is beyond the scope of this project.\(^12\)

This dissertation presupposes a view now almost unanimous among leading scholars that

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\(^{8}\) The Göttingen school identified a nomistic redactional layer (*DtrN* or *DtrN\(^1\) and *DtrN\(^2\)*) which insists on obedience to the Law and a prophetic Deuteronomist or *DtrP* characterized by its insistence on prophecy as witnessed by the prophetic stories and oracles in both the books of Samuel and Kings.


\(^{11}\) Jon L. Berquist, Berquist, “Identities and Empire” in Louis Jonker (ed), *Historiography and Identity (Re)formation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 6. Berquist argues that the Deuteronomic History is a Persian imperial project aimed at explaining why Judah has lost the land and why the Yehudites are better off without self-governance.

\(^{12}\) Perhaps, one of the best exposés on the redaction of the Deuteronomic History is in Römer’s *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2005) Römer postulates a Josianic redaction, an exilic redaction and a final redaction in the Persian period. He, nevertheless, admits to difficulties associated with evidence of redaction in the Persian era (cf. esp.165-183)
the final redaction took place in the exilic or post-exilic environment.\textsuperscript{13} According to Berquist, an integral interpretation of \textit{all} of Deuteronomic History, should lead readers to the conclusion that the narrative is not as much concerned with recovering the past glories of the monarchy or the temple, as it is with constructing the identity of the “Yehudites” in the post-exilic community. He insists that the scribal activity that produced the Deuteronomic history took place in the post-exilic Persian era Yehud (between 538-333 B.C.E.). “The literary skills required for such a document, represented in our extant literature as six separate books, would have included more physical resources than the exilic community possessed, in order to write and preserve such a sizeable corpus, and to transmit such a literary complex as a unit throughout the time of exile and beyond.”\textsuperscript{14} The Deuteronomic Historian’s project collected, adapted, “corrected”, criticized and interpreted various older traditions from the perspective of new socio-political and religious environment of the post-exilic era. Hence, this project assumes that the Jezebel story in its final form in the Deuteronomic History is best understood in the post-exilic context of Yehud.

A related question is that about the identity and location of the Deuteronomic Historian(s). In a study in 1972, M. Weinfeld argued that the first Deuteronomists were courtiers in Jerusalem who had begun writing during the reign of Hezekiah.\textsuperscript{15} A few scholars have theorized that the Deuteronomic school was of northern provenance, from

\textsuperscript{13}I acknowledge that there are arguments against assigning finality to the ‘Exile’. In this paper, post-exilic is to be understood in a technical or chronological sense as referring to events after the fall of Judah in 587 B.C.E. and the subsequent deportation to Babylon.

\textsuperscript{14}Römer, \textit{The So-Called Deuteronomistic History}, 6

\textsuperscript{15}For more on Weinfeld’s hypothesis, see M. Weinfeld, \textit{Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School}, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972), 148-171
prophetical-Levitical circles. Scholars such as Römer and de Pury argue that, if we accept an initial pre-exilic redaction, then this would have taken place in Jerusalem. In his much acclaimed The So-Called Deuteronomistic History, Römer envisions three watershed redactional moments: the Josianic reforms, the exile and the Persian era. The optimism that accompanied the well documented Josianic reforms triggered by the momentous discovery of the book of the law in the temple needed reinterpretation after the catastrophe of 587 B.C.E. “With the loss of land, king, and temple, it is easy to imagine the development of a second edition that would accommodate antimonarchic traditions and gravitate toward a more qualified understanding of divine blessings.”

While the available evidence does not permit present scholarship to be more precise in dating the redactional materials in the Deuteronomic History, it does make a strong case for its final compilation in the post-exilic period.

A relevant and significant question regards the purpose of such an enterprise. Contrary to Noth’s opinion that the purpose of the Deuteronomic History was to establish that the divine judgment threatened by YHWH is fait accompli, a number of scholars believe that the Deuteronomistic History envisions a new phase of Israel’s history. Hans Walter Wolf believes that the answer to the question of the purpose of the Deuteronomistic Historian’s project lies not so much in the end of the narrative as in the

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17 Hens-Piazza, I & II Kings (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 5
18 See Berquist, 6-8
key moments within it. In these key moments, one recognizes an ever-changing history based on reciprocal actions between God and Israel. While Israel’s actions have irreversible consequences, judgment is followed by redemption as God continues with his people. Therefore, while Noth may be justified in pointing out that the catastrophic events of 587 B.C.E. left little room for hope, “still, if Judges 2 and 1 Samuel 12 are to be believed, there is yet room for hope: the cry to Yahweh, with a confession of guilt, a prayer for deliverance, and a willingness to give renewed obedience, may be efficacious again.”

The fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.E., and the end of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, meant that the spotlight turned on Jerusalem and Judah. Ahaz agreed to pay tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III. It appears that Assyria was satisfied with receiving tribute from Judah and did not push to incorporate it as a province of the vast empire. This ensured that Judah enjoyed a sustained period of peace and stability through the eighty-five years of the combined reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh. During this period, Hezekiah is on record to have carried out cultic reforms. Liverani reasons that these reforms were, in all likelihood, “the climax of a process triggered by a natural internal evolution, perhaps by the influx of priests and levites from the northern kingdom, and certainly by confrontation with the ideology of the large empire of which Judah was a small peripheral part.”

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20 Ibid., 69
The next historical event worthy of note, is the collapse of the Assyrian empire. By the middle of the 7th century, the empire began to decline largely due to its inability to sustain its strength in the provinces, but also due to complacency, stagnation and inactivity. There was growing rebellion and hatred of Assyrian hegemony in the provinces and among the vassal states. This was nowhere more evident than among the tribes of Lower Mesopotamia and their Median allies. Indeed, the Medes led the offensive against Assyria. They overran Ashur in 614 B.C.E. and Ninneveh in 612 B.C.E. Nevertheless, it was the Chaldaean king Nebuchadrezzar who benefitted politically and territorially from the Median victory over the Assyrians. Due to its military ineptitude, Judah depended heavily on its alliance with one of the two mighty powers of the period, Egypt and Babylon. It was a game of strategic calculations on which depended the survival of the state. In 598 B.C.E., Nebuchadrezzar laid siege to Jerusalem after Jehoiakim had made a strategic error of reneging on his oath to Babylon and flirting with Egypt. Jehoiakim died during the siege and was succeeded by his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiakin (2Kgs 24:8). He capitulated to the Chaldaeans and was deported in 597 B.C.E. together with his family, nobles, military officials and craftsmen to Babylon. Jehoiakin’s uncle, Zedekiah, was placed in charge of Judah. Initially, Zedekiah was a loyal servant of Nebuchadrezzar and even travelled to Babylon in his fourth year (593 B.C.E.) with a large retinue to pay homage to his overlord. However, in 589 B.C.E., Zedekiah inexplicably broke his oath of allegiance with Babylon. Babylon’s reaction was swift and decisive. In 588 B.C.E., Nebucharezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and after about a year and a half, in 586/7 Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Zedekiah was taken

22 Note that 2 Chron 36:9 indicates Jehoiakin was eight years old.
captive, his sons and his closest noble men were executed, while he was himself was blinded, bound in chains and exiled to Babylon. It is believed that about 4,600 Judahites were exiled to Babylon in three batches, in 597, 586 and 582 B.C.E.

Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians did not transplant populations in conquered lands. As Liverani observes,

> “the two imperial strategies of Assyria and Babylon had in common the aim of acquiring specialized workers and crushing the ruling class; but they diverged in essential points. While the Assyrians wanted to mix different populations to create a uniform ‘Assyrian provincial’ culture, and to run the new provinces by providing them with efficient local administrative structures (the Assyrian provincial palaces), the Babylonians indeed seemed to be resigned to abandoning the conquered lands to total socio-political and cultural degradation, but in the meantime allowed the deported elites to keep their own individuality.”

The Babylonian policy made it possible for exiles to build settlements and maintain their ethnic identity. In Judah, there remained the lower classes of the population, the rural dwellers and the farmers who tended the vineyards. It may also be assumed that neighboring peoples moved in to take residence in the spaces created by the deportations. A governor, Gedaliah, was appointed over Judah and a garrison of Babylonian soldiers established there.

There is a dearth of historical material relating to the situation in Judah during the period from 582-539 B.C.E. When Nebuchadrezzar died in 562 B.C.E., the Babylonian empire began to experience some instability characterized by internal strife and coups. The last king, Nabuna’id, who had a relatively long reign from 555-539 B.C.E., was

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23 Liverani, 195.
reputed to be evil and to have neglected the cult of Marduk to his own detriment.\(^{24}\) In 539 B.C.E., Cyrus king of Persia, conquered Babylon so that Judah and its exiled population passed to a new overlord. After Cyrus had secured the throne of Babylon, he liberated prisoners and ordered that all the gods that had been captured from foreign cities be returned to their home shrines and their temples restored. Together with the gods, subdued peoples were also free to return their countries, repair their temples and restore their cultic laws, as long as these did not contradict Persian law. “As far as is known, Yahweh was not a prisoner in the form of a statue in Babylon. Thus, the decree of Cyrus could not concern him or his exiled people.”\(^{25}\) It is reasonable to surmise that the good disposition of the new Cyrus administration towards foreigners in Babylon created the avenue for various groups to negotiate their liberation and return to their homelands. Some Judahites would have seized such an opportunity without hesitation. The biblical narrative certainly credits Cyrus with the momentous order of repatriation of the exiled Judahites (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1). The return, in fact, did not take place at the time of Cyrus. Indeed, it is not until the reign of Artaxerxes in the mid-fifth century that we have evidence of two official permits of return for groups of Judahite exiles headed by Zerubbabel and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 7:12-26 and Neh 2:7-8). It is plausible that small groups did indeed return to Judah prior to the edicts of Artaxerxes. “At first (in the time of Cyrus) these will have been informal, taking advantage of a political climate favorable to pilgrims and exiles.”

\(^{24}\) A Mesopotamian text, The Cyrus Cylinder contains an inscription in which Marduk complains and is upset with Nabuna’id for neglecting his duties to the cult of Marduk. As a result, Marduk commissions Cyrus to conquer Babylon, restore peace, rebuild the cities and repatriate gods and peoples. See A. Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy”, *JSOT* 25 (1983), 88ff.

to the repatriation of groups deported by the defeated dynasty; later on, they were
formally authorized by the reigning emperors.”

Whatever the occasion, there is little doubt that a sizeable population of Judahites
returned to Judah. It is impossible to tell how many people returned, first, because the
process extended over a long period, and second, because many exiles did not return to
Judah. Nonetheless, the returnees included very significant segments of Judahite society
such as priests and elite families. These were the people whose family heritage could be
verified by the records kept by the elders and priests in exile (cf. Ezra 2 and Neh. 7).
These felt the obligation of restoration and rebuilding. However, as Rainer Albertz
observes, it is a misnomer to categorize what happened after the return from the exile as
“restoration”: “This usage completely ignored that a restoration of the pre-exilic
conditions which means the reestablishment of a state and the reinstatement of a Davidic
king, did not take place.”

It is impossible to be exact about the date of the final Deuteronomic redaction. It is
the scholarly opinion that the latest datable event mentioned is the release of Jehoiachin
from Babylonian prison (561 B.C.E.). Many argue that the final redaction took place
between this date and the return of the exiles in 538 B.C.E. Actually, establishing an
exact date for the final redaction of the Deuteronomic History is peripheral to this project.
Suffice it to emphasize that the new situation created by the end of the Assyrian and

26 Liverani, 253
28 For an in-depth discussion on the possible stages of development of the Deuteronomic History, see Susanne Otto, “The Composition of the Elijah-Elisha Stories and the Deuteronomistic History.” JSOT 27 4 (2003), 487-508. Otto argues that with reference to 1Kgs 16:29-2Kgs 10:36, there is a core Deuteronomistic composition that can be dated to shortly after 562 B.C.E. To this core Deuteronomistic narrative is added post-Deuteronomistic compositions.
Babylonian colonization of the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah is the context of the final Deuteronomic redaction.

The collapse of both Samaria and Jerusalem meant the end of both Israel and Judah as geopolitical entities. Civil and political authority was separated from religious authority. Neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians sought to impose their deities and their religious practices on the peoples of Israel and Judah. Hence, while the new Judah had lost its political independence, it retained its religious hegemony. It is under the auspices of the new religious authority in Judah that the final redaction of the Deuteronomic History took place. The brute end of the Davidic dynasty and the Solomonic temple and later the complex and long-term process of the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem and the return of Yahwists to Yehud, started a process of reflection and reformation of Israel’s religious tradition ending in the re-edition – and in some cases first edition – of religious texts.”

This new complex situation precipitated a crisis of identity among the Judahites. This is the context of the Deuteronomic revision of Israel’s history focusing on creating a new community of Israel, with a common faith, common descent and a common culture.

B. THE EMERGENCE OF MONOTHEISM: YHWH ALONE IS GOD

The debate about the nature and development of biblical monotheism seems endless. Basically, scholarly arguments have tried to establish whether and when Israel’s faith in

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29 Albertz and Becking, xii
Yahweh evolved from polytheism through monolatry to monotheism. Many twentieth century scholars believed that Israelite religion was uniquely monotheistic from its origins. The Yahwistic faith was conceived to have dramatically appeared among the people of Israel who shared a distinct social and religious identity. Yehezkel Kaufmann typifies this position when he writes that “Israelite religion was an original creation of the people of Israel. It was absolutely different from anything the pagan world ever knew, its monotheistic world view had no antecedents in paganism. . . . Despite appearances, Israel was not a polytheistic people.”

In subsequent years, this pure monotheistic faith was tainted by contact with the religious practices of the Canaanite tribes among whom Israel settled. In a 1991 article, Peter Hayman expressed what may be for many an extreme opposing view, insisting that

“it is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God. . . . no progress beyond the simple formulas of the book of Deuteronomy can be discerned in Judaism before the philosophers of the Middle Ages. . . . Judaism never escaped from the legacy of the battles for supremacy between Yahweh, Baal and El from which it emerged. . . . The pattern of Jewish beliefs about God remains monarchistic throughout. God is king of a heavenly court consisting of many powerful beings, not always under his control.”

While Hayman’s positon may seem extreme, there is now sufficient evidence to dismiss the views of Kaufmann and others who held that Israel had a uniquely monotheistic faith from the onset. Kaufmann’s argument is basically indefensible today: “The results of

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30 Monotheism is the belief in the existence of only one God. Monolatry or Henotheism is the belief of exclusive allegiance to one god without denying the existence of other gods.

31 Yehezkiel Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile. Translated and abridged by Moshe Greenberg, Third Impression (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 2-3. Kaufmann’s position is supported by some notable scholars including William Foxwell Albright who believed that monotheism was an essential concept of Mosaic religion from the very beginning, Helmer Ringgren, George Fohrer, Frank Cross and more recently, Jeffrey Tigay.

32 Peter Hayman, “Monotheism-A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” JJS, 42 1(Spring, 1991), 1-2
Kaufmann’s historical reconstruction are so much at variance with those of critical biblical scholarship in general that it is difficult to know how to go about evaluating them. More recently, biblical scholars and historians of religion have tended, in the light of comparative documents from Ugarit, and especially from the evidence of archaeological and epigraphic finds in Israel, to conclude that there was an organic evolution of Israelite religion from its Near Easter milieu. Israelite monotheism, from the witness of the Biblical text itself, evolved gradually and reached clarity after the exile, in specific historical circumstances. Indeed, offensive pagan practices condemned by the prophets and the Deuteronomic Historian are religious customs that were practiced within Yahwism and not some alien Canaanite intrusions into a pure YHWH cult.

There really was no great conflict between two religions, Canaanite and Israelite, but rather a gradual evolution of a complex Yahwistic religion from a polytheistic past to the monotheistic values envisioned by the prophetic, Deuteronomic, and Priestly reformers. This monotheistic religion asserted itself completely only in the exile when the common people began to accept the belief system of the reformers.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Israel’s religion was not monolithic prior to the Exile. “Until the fall of the northern kingdom there were two official Yahweh traditions. Each could lay claim to being the right people of Yahweh and denounce the other. With Judah as the only surviving kingdom representing Yahweh’s people, not only the political competition, but the religious competition had ended.” Moreover, besides the two official northern and southern traditions of Yahwism, there is evidence that there were local variations of Yahwism, and that many Israelites also worshipped Baal,

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35 Ahlström, 681.
Asherah and other deities in addition. \(^{36}\) With the loss of independence and the influx of foreigners into Judah, there was an urgent need for the definition of true religion. “The changed social, political and mental circumstances provoked a religion on the move. To phrase it in an oversimplified way: being Yahwistic was no longer based on tradition but on choice.” \(^{37}\) By close of the sixth century, clear monotheistic voices emerge in prophetic literature (see Isa 44-46)

The process by which Israel’s faith evolved from a polytheism to monotheism has also been the subject of scholarly inquiry. Perhaps, the first scholar to have undertaken a careful and intellectual inquiry into the evolutionary process of Israelite religion was Julius Wellhausen. \(^{38}\) In a very useful study Mark Smith analyzed what he understood to be a process of “convergence” and “differentiation”. Israel’s faith evolved by absorbing some of the characteristics of the other deities while also rejecting certain practices it deemed repugnant. \(^{39}\) Morten Smith had no doubts about Israel’s polytheistic past, arguing that although the cult of YHWH is the principal concern of the Old Testament, it is unlikely that it was the principal religious concern of the Israelites. \(^{40}\) Granted that Israel gradually evolved from a polytheistic past to a monotheistic faith, is it possible to trace this process or to identify a period or event(s) that aided this revelation? In a 1970 paper

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\(^{36}\) See William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 110ff. Dever sufficiently establishes the widespread worship of numerous deities in both Israel and Judah in what he describes as ‘folk religion’. This picture is blurred by the ‘minority report’ of the Deuteronomic redactors.  

\(^{37}\) Bob Becking, “Law as Expression of Religion (Ezra 7-10)” in Albertz and Becking (eds) *Yahwism after the Exile*, 19

\(^{38}\) See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*. Translated by A. Menzies and S. Black. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973) Wellhausen tried to construct the history of Israel’s religion through a chronological sequencing of the sources


entitled “The Geography of Monotheism”, Denis Baly argued brilliantly that monotheism emerges not in the desert, but in urban settings in the midst of great intellectual battles regarding issues such as evil, human suffering, the universal rule of God.  

Baly distinguished between “Primitive Monotheism” which is common in agrarian societies when one deity is elevated well above the hierarchy, and Proto-Monotheism which is found in the more developed religions. He argues that Proto-Monotheism emerges in an environment where diverse competing political and cultural currents meet. In such circumstances, the intelligentsia of the dominant culture subsume and synthesize the regional deities into a national god. Baly argues that Israel’s faith went through various stages of purification. The Sinai experience laid the grounds by placing YHWH above nature and refusing to reduce him to a geographical location. In his view, Elijah was not a pure monotheist as he affirmed regional monotheism. The prophet Amos was the first effective monotheist emphasizing the universal authority of YHWH. But it is Deutero-Isaiah who developed monotheism more thoroughly and enabled it to become the faith of the masses.  

In his more recent book, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts, Smith argues that the concept of monism in Ugaritic polytheism is key to understanding the evolution of Israel’s monotheistic faith. Divinity in Ugarit was understood as a four-fold hierarchical structure.  

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42 See Ibid., 254-256

apex was El and his consort, Asherah. Next, were the seventy “sons of god” who were assigned to the seventy nations of the earth. Then came the chief servant of the divine household, Kathar wa-Hasis, and finally all the other servants or messengers of the divine household. Smith argues that at an early stage in Israel’s faith, YHWH was understood to be one of the sons of El assigned as the patron deity of Israel. This is reflected in the Septuagint rendering of Deut. 32:8-9:

> When the Most High divided the nations, when he scattered the sons of Adam, set up the boundaries of nations according to the number of the angels of God, then Jacob became the portion of the Lord, his people; Israel (became) the line of his inheritance.⁴⁴

Similarly, Ps.82 presents El presiding over the divine council in which YHWH brings an accusation against the other deities. These and similar texts reflect an earlier stage of Israel’s faith, when YHWH was understood as one of the “sons of god”. Smith further argues that, at some point in the later days of the monarchy, YHWH became identified with El and Asherah became his consort. This association is confirmed by archaeological finds pairing YHWH and Asherah and by the biblical texts denouncing the cult symbol of Asherah in the Jerusalem temple. It is believed that, at this stage, YHWH was conceived as the Divine King ruling over all the other deities (cf. Ps.29:1-2) Gradually, the other gods were understood as mere expressions of YHWH’s power. It was not until the post-exilic period that a clear monotheistic faith emerged. Smith believes this was the result of a combination of two factors. First, there were changes in Israel’s social structure of the family. Previously, the family unit was an extended line of relationships similar to the situation in Ugarit which had enabled the concept of the divine family. However, the

⁴⁴ My translation. The MT has “according to the number of the sons of Israel” in place of “according to the number of the angels of God”. The rendering of the LXX is supported by the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QDí³ and 4QDí⁴).
family unit went through dramatic traumatic changes in the 8th and 7th centuries which eroded the cohesive force of the extended family. The concept of individual accountability was emphasized (cf. Deut 26:16; Jer 31:29-30; Ezek 18). In sum, the rise of the individual as a social unit provided the conceptual framework for the idea of the single god in place of the divine family. A second factor that enabled the emergence of monotheism in Israel during the post-exilic period was the dominance of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires. For a long time, Israel understood that a nation was as powerful as its patron god. As long as Israel dominated or was on par with its neighbors, this concept was vindicated. The extended domination of Israel by these foreign powers meant that Israel needed to rethink its idea of divine control and patronage. Israel came to the understanding that its God, YHWH, was the one god in control of all the kingdoms of the earth. YHWH used empires such as the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians to punish and to redeem his chosen people. Such is the understanding regarding the “messiahship” of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28; 45:1)

Thomas Römer argues along similar lines: “The king had been deported, the Temple destroyed, and the geographic integrity of Judah was compromised by the deportations and voluntary emigration. One way of explaining the situation was that the gods of Babylon were stronger, and had won a victory over the national god Yhwh, who had clearly been defeated.”45 Adopting Armin Steil’s categories, Römer analyzes three possible reactions to crisis by different social groups: prophetic, priestly and mandarin.46

46 The mandarin was an imperial royal Chinese official. Römer employs it here to represent the elites who enjoyed privileged positions in the old system. They now seek to understand the new system and to accommodate themselves to it so that they can maintain their privileges.
While the prophetic attitude sees the crisis as the dawn of a new era and the mandarin tries to understand and adapt to the new situation to preserve existing privileges, the priestly reaction is to ignore the new reality and attempt return to a sacred or mythical origins of society. According to Römer, all three attitudes are preserved in the Hebrew Bible and the mandarin posture is expressed by the Deuteronomic school. “This group is obsessed by the end of the monarchy and the deportation of the elites of Judah, and it seeks to explain the exile by constructing the history of Yhwh and his people, from the beginning under Moses up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the aristocracy. This is the story the Hebrew Bible tells from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings.”

He believes the central thrust of this Deuteronomic redaction is the explanation of the Exile and deportation. Thus, it concludes:

So YHWH sent against him the troops of Chaldea and the troops of Aram and the troops of Moab and the troops of the sons of Ammon; and he sent them against Judah to destroy him according to the word of YHWH which he spoke by the hand of his servants the prophets...because of the anger YHWH had against Jerusalem and against Judah, he cast them away from his presence. (2 Kgs. 24:2, 20)

The stark reality of the overwhelming dominance of the colonial forces, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, pushed Israel’s faith to accept the universal authority of YHWH. This evolution laid the foundation for the later monotheistic expressions in both Deuteronomic redaction and prophetic literature. Römer argues that there was an intermediary stage of monolatry in which Deuteronomic expressions do not preclude existence of other deities. However, the latest Deuteronomic redaction in the Persian period is clearly monotheistic (cf. Deut 4:39) To reconcile monotheism with the privileged position of Israel, the Deuteronomic redactors had recourse to the concept of divine election, the idea of ‘am

\[47\] Ibid., 216
qādōš (Deut 7:6; 26:19 and Deut 10:14,17). Any person who worships any other deity cannot be a part of the ‘am qādōš.

In sum, monotheism, exclusive Yahwism, “was largely a response to the tragic experience of the exile. It was, in effect, a ‘rationalization’ of defeat, an attempt to forge a new identity and destiny for a people who otherwise would have been left without hope.”48 Having arrived at monotheistic Yahwism, Israel’s story needed revision. The Deuteronomic Historian undertook such a revision from Joshua to 2 Kings. In this revision, the complex religious situation of Northern Israel during the period of the Omrides is revised and reinterpreted resulting in the throwing back of the monotheistic Yahwist faith and, subsequently, the portrayal of Jezebel as a foreign Baalist queen trying to introduce alien deities into Israel. The narrative portrait of Jezebel as a murderer and persecutor of the prophets of YHWH (1 Kgs 18-19) serves to highlight the threat non-Yahwistic religions posed to Yahwism in the post-exilic Yehud.

C. ETHNOCENTRISM: RETURNEES, REMAINEES AND FOREIGNERS

The very name “Israel” during this period denoted a very complex reality. The fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. meant that the name “Israel”, as a political and geographical entity of the biblical period disappeared. Ahlström believes that “because this name was used for the worshippers of both the nations of Israel and Judah, it survived as a cultic term for

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48 Dever, 297
the remnant of Yahweh’s people, Judah”. Then Judah came to an end with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.:

This was the end. Or was it? In a surprising twist of history, a short while later Israel was back, not as a kingdom but as a concept. In fact, the fall of one Israel opened the way for the rise of another Israel – the children of Israel – composed of twelve tribes, encompassing the territory ruled by two Hebrew kingdoms. In the course of this transformation, texts that originated in the northern kingdom were incorporated into the Bible, to form part of the great Hebrew epic.

This would be the project of the Deuteronomic Historians as the reinterpreted Israel’s story after the exile.

According to Becking, “the concept of Israel in this period has various dimensions: religious, ethnic, geographical, etc. The least that can be said is that ‘Israel’ is a conglomerate of various groups: descendants of the indigenous population of the kingdom of Judah, returnees from the Babylonian Exile, Mesopotamians exiled by Assyrian kings, Mesopotamians joining returnees from the Exile, proto-Samaritans, and the like.” Some scholars estimate that as a result of factors such as deportation, insecurity, emigration and deaths, the population reduced from about 100,000 to about 40,000. The southern parts of Judah were invaded by Arab and Edomite tribes. It appears that Benjamin escaped relatively unscathed by the massive deportations.

There was, nevertheless, a significant portion of the population of Judah that did not go into exile. The Deuteronomic Historian refers to these people in derogatory terms:

49 Ahlström, 680
51 Becking, 19
52 See Oded Lipschits, “Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the fifth Centuries B.C.E.,” in Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds) Judah and Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323-376
“But he (Nebuzaradan) left from the poor of the land, cooks and vinedressers and farmers” (2 Kgs 25:12)

The remainees who were referred to as the ‘am hā’āreṣ or “people of the land” had a significant claim on the ownership of the land having lived there continuously through the disasters of deportations. The relationship between remainees and returnees was destined to be tenuous, contentious and fractious. To the returnees, although these remainees were Yahwists, they lacked the cultic refinement and ideological ideas that the experience of the exile had molded in the returnees. Moreover, some of the remainees had formed liaisons through intermarriage with non-Israelite immigrants (cf. Neh. 13:23-27).

In this melting pot of peoples and cultures, there was an urgent need for self-definition. This search for a viable self by the establishment of religious, ethnic and cultural standards is evident in the Deuteronomic redaction of Israel’s story. The concept of Israel as ‘am qādōš (Deut. 7:6; 26:19), a covenanted people with distinct religious and moral obligations as enshrined in the Deuteronomic law, emerged. This concept is in contrast to that of the ‘am hā’āreṣ. To further bolster the cohesion of the new people, the concept of common ethnicity, of common ancestry emerged.

Common ancestry is a belief, a dogma, a shared subjective apprehension not necessarily open to historical verification. It is well known that myths of origin, including myths of ancestral paternity, can also be invented. This may well be the case with the claim to be ‘children of Abraham’, since the traditions about Abraham do not begin to take shape until the time of the exile.\footnote{53 Blenkinsopp,18}

The myth of shared ancestry, besides serving the purpose of integration, also serves to delimit and exclude others from membership. This is forcefully true of biblical historiography with its claim to sacred authority. “When biblical myths carve up
humanity into peoples, they make assertions of collective identity in negative terms. To be Israel is to be not-Egypt; identity is purchased at the expense of the other.”

The Deuteronomic redactors found the best foil for the new pan-Israelite identity in the concept of the Canaanites. The Canaanites constituted and amalgamated group including the Amorites, the Hittites and the highland Jebusites. Christoph Uehlinger has analyzed the ethno-geographic references to the Canaan/Canaanites in such texts as Deut 1:7; Josh 13:3ff.; Exod 3:17,13:11; Ezek 16:3 and Neh 9:8, and concluded that these, and similar other occurrences, are of post-exilic or, at best, exilic date. Uehlinger concludes that “the Canaanites and other pre-Israelite peoples are literary creations fixed upon pseudo-ethnonyms, they have no more historical reality as people than the book of Joshua’s ‘children of Israel’ invading the country from the east.” He believes that Philistine-Phoenician commercial interests controlled much of Palestine west of the Jordan. Their profit driven trade crystallized into images of collective identity.

The gradual expansion of Phoenician commercial activity was gradually perceived as ‘Canaanite’ presence all over the coastal strip of Palestine and, to a lesser extent, in the Jordan valley. The impossibility of the Jerusalemite establishment to compete with this ‘Canaanite’ network probably fostered a growing anti-Canaanite aversion in Judah and particularly in Jerusalem. The antagonism may have been rooted in a socio-economic and cultural conflict. It was at the same time perceived in religious terms (see, e.g. the Sabbath incident related in Neh 13:16-22). Uehlinger also believes that texts like Ezek. 16 reflect an inner Judahite conflict. This conflict was gradually projected, through a rhetoric of exclusion, as a prehistoric conflict between Israel and Canaan.

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55 Christoph Uehlinger, “The ‘Canaanites’ and the other ‘pre-Israelite’ peoples in Story and History” Part II, in FZPhTh 47 1-2 (2000)
56 Ibid., 187
57 Ibid., 189
While some of Uehlinger’s claims may go beyond proof as a result of the dearth of information regarding this era, his argument regarding the continued and increasing influence of the Phoenicians during this era is confirmed by other sources. After examining classical writings including Herodotus’ *Histories* and Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, and epigraphic evidence from the Persian period, Vadim Jigoulov argues convincingly that Phoenicia maintained some degree of autonomy even under Persian domination.58 Describing what he terms *managed autonomy*, Jigoulov argues that the Persian administration only required Phoenician collaboration in economic and military projects, and the timely payment of tribute. Otherwise, the Phoenicians ran their own affairs and maintained their socio-cultural identity. Moreover, the classical sources reveal “a picture of Phoenicia as a powerful conglomerate of independent city-states, which contributed heavily to the Persian domination of the eastern Mediterranean in the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E.”59 While the Phoenician collaboration with the imperial forces may have been a smart move to maintain some degree of autonomy, it was unlikely that such a policy would have earned them any favors among the neighboring states, especially from Judah reeling from the consequences of foreign interventions. Moreover, within the Deuteronomic framework, the land of the Sidonians belonged to Israel as part of the divine promise (Josh. 13:6). In this context, a hostile Judahite attitude towards Phoenicia and everything Phoenician is quite understandable. Jezebel is highlighted as the typical Phoenician.


59 Ibid., 139. Ahlstöm expresses the same opinion, cf. Ahlström, 825-30.
D. THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORIAN’S PORTRAIT OF A NEW ISRAELITE IDENTITY

As noted earlier in this study, the book of Deuteronomy serves as a lens through which the narrative of Deuteronomic History is to be viewed. “Cast in the form of a series of speeches delivered by Moses to ‘all Israel’ gathered on the plains of Moab prior to crossing the Jordan and entering the land promised to their fathers, the book of Deuteronomy provides a kind of social manifesto of ‘Israelite’ ethnic identity.” Thus, for the Deuteronomist, the entity Israel is created in the plains of Moab through a covenant with YHWH mediated by Moses. In Deut 4:1-40, Moses outlines the uniqueness of Israel emphasizing the gift of statutes and righteous judgments of hattôrāh hazzō’ (Deut 4:8). The possession of the Torah is the mark of the distinctiveness of Israel and of its special relationship to YHWH. Some scholars believe that the sē,er hattôrāh discovered by the high priest Hilkiah and which, apparently, precipitated the reforms of Josiah, may actually have been a copy of some parts of Deuteronomy: “An extensive cultic reform by Josiah immediately following its discovery (2 Kgs 23:4-24) gives the impression that its content legislated the cult and proper worship before the Lord. This has led many to surmise that perhaps the discovered law book was some early tradition of what later became the book of Deuteronomy.”

The process of forging a new pan-Israelite identity already started when large groups of northerners fled the Assyrian conquest and relocated in Judah with their story. Finkelstein has argued that two basic concepts made up the core of the pan-Israelite idea:

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60 E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity. SBL (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 55
61 Hens-Piazza, 384.
“the centrality of the Davidic dynasty and the Jerusalem temple for all Hebrews.” Finkelstein believes they were composed in Judah within the circles of northern populations that had resettled there after the fall of Samaria.

These “northern traditions that were cherished by what was now a significant part of the population of Judah needed to be absorbed, not ignored. The author did not eliminate them, because he needed to cater to the large northern population in Judah...The texts were included in the Judahite story but at the same time were addressed in such a way as to attempt to vindicate David from almost all serious wrongdoing. The author incorporated the northern and southern traditions but subjected them to his main ideological goals: to promote the Davidic kings as the only legitimate rulers over all Israel and the Jerusalem temple as the only legitimate cult-place for all Bene Israel.

The northern traditions centered around the cult figures of Moses and Elijah, and their encounters with YHWH at Sinai. These traditions teach a theology of a conditional covenant between YHWH and Israel. YHWH will bestow blessings or curses depending on Israel’s response to the dictates of the covenant law. This theology contrasts with the theology of an unconditional covenant between YHWH and the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem.

With the collapse of Judah and the deportation, Israel no longer existed as a group of people with fixed geographical coordinates. It becomes a people without a country. In the meantime, groups like the Moabites, Edomites and Ammonites infiltrated into Judah.

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62 Finkelstein, 155
63 Ibid, 157. Finkelstein argues that the ideology of promoting the Davidic king represents an earlier stage of redaction in the era after the fall of Samaria and before the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of king and people.
and occupied the spaces created by the deportations. In the Deuteronomic Historian’s reinterpretation of Israel’s history in the post-exilic era,

we find the proper context for the narratives aiming to establish specific relations with neighboring peoples. Note that in this case these are not imaginary peoples, like those populating the ‘empty land’ given to the twelve tribes, as in the historiography of the conquest. They are rather those peoples who really contested the possession of Palestine in the fifth-fourth century with the returnees.\footnote{Liverani, 264.}

The Edomites (Esau) and the Arameans (represented by Laban) are accorded hospitable press while the Moabites, Ammonites, are excluded from any cultic assimilation owing to their origins from incestuous relationships (Gen 19:30-38).

There is ample evidence from the book of Deuteronomy that during this period, the Judahites came to acknowledge their minority status in relation to its neighbors (Deut 4:38; 7:1; 9:1, 23). This acknowledgment becomes a summons to develop survival strategies. The construction of Israel as covenant people called to distinguish itself from the other nations by observing the statutes of the Torah is one of the strategies of survival. There was increasing ethnocentrism among the returnees as their relations with the ‘remainees’ degenerated from mutual suspicion through denigration to alienation. This is most evident in Judah’s attitude towards the Samarians. The returnees who had developed a strong sense of Jewish identity during the exile had to contend with settling in multi-ethnic territories with large and powerful non-Jewish elements and with no safeguards for the protection of Judahite interests from the imperial authorities. The religious leaders, the priestly families were particularly apprehensive and opposed any liaisons. This apprehension becomes law in Deuteronomy:
"When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them. You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons.” (Deut. 7:1-3)

These authoritative voices confirm a new consciousness of Israelite identity, a people of common ethnic descent, common faith in the one God called YHWH with consequent cultural, ethical and moral demands. This people shares a common fate: their survival and prosperity depends on faithfulness to YHWH and to the demands of his covenant.

Membership is expressed and maintained by obedience and conformity. In this environment, the Jezebel story becomes a story of alienation and of exclusion: she is a foreigner, an idol worshipper, a cultural and ethical misfit.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE JEZEBEL STORY: THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORIAN’S ALIENATING PORTRAIT OF JEZEBEL

A. Introduction

B. Analysis of Relevant Texts
i. Ethnic Alienation
ii. Religious Alienation
iii. Cultural and Moral Alienation
iv. The Death of Jezebel as the Ultimate Alienation
v. Conclusion

A. INTRODUCTION

The Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel is achieved through a variety of narrative techniques. Generally, biblical narratives do not give detailed physical or physiological descriptions of characters, although there are references to physical features. For instance, Mephibosheth is lame (2 Sam 4:4; 9:13), Saul is tall (1 Sam 9:2) and David is ruddy (1 Sam 16:12). There is, however, no detailed physical description that will help the reader create a visual image of the character since such descriptions focus mainly on enabling the reader to “situate the character in terms of his place in society, his own particular situation, and his outstanding traits – in other words, to tell what kind of person he is.”¹ By a variety of narrative techniques, biblical narratives help the reader to form the character in his mind. By describing the status (king, queen, princess, widow, wealthy man, elder etc.), the profession (priest, prophet, prostitute, shepherd, etc.) gentilic designation (Sidonian, Amalekite, Tishbite, Calebite, Amorite, etc.) the narrative helps the reader perceive the character in a different sense. References to the inner life/thoughts, words and actions, and by the technique of character contrast, the narrative

¹Adele Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 36
prods the reader to form a portrait of the character. While the character fulfills a role in the development of the plot, it is precisely in the unfolding of the plot that the reader comes to appreciate the character. The narratives concerning Jezebel have definite character referents which guide the reader to form a Jezebel character. The references to her status, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and the contrasts of her character with those of the Sidonian widow, Elijah, Ahab and the eunuchs, help the reader form a portrait of Jezebel. This chapter argues that the image of Jezebel that the reader forms from these narratives is a picture of everything that Israel is not. The Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel amounts to an alienation of a queen, who, in her proper historical context in 9th century Israel, was very much a citizen. By religious, ethnic and cultural standards, Jezebel was very much at home in 9th century Israel. By the time the final redaction of Deuteronomic History in 6th-5th century in post-exilic Judah, religion ethnicity and culture had undergone significant transformations. The reinterpretation of her character, more than two centuries after her demise, in the context of a post-exilic Judah looking for a new identity, by scribes schooled in the fictional Deuteronomic pan-Israelite project, resulted in the loss of her citizenship. This argument develops under three main interrelated themes: ethnic or gentilic alienation, religious alienation and cultural or moral alienation.

B. ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT TEXTS

2 See Ibid., 31-42
The Jezebel story is embedded in the narrative of the reign of Ahab which is in turn subordinated to the narratives of the Elijah-Elisha cycle (1 Kgs 16:29-2 Kgs 13). “Though the narrative of Ahab’s reign continues, he is no longer the protagonist. Instead, a prophet assumes center stage in interacting with this king….”3 With reference to the Elijah legends, Marsha White believes that, apart from the drought narrative (1 Kgs 17), the legends “were composed by highly literate scribes of the Jehu dynasty to legitimate its overthrow of the Omrides and to shore up its power during times of political and military weakness.”4 Susan Otto traced the development of the texts from 1 Kgs 16:29 to 2 Kgs 10:36 and made some significant contributions. She defined the work of the Deuteronomists as consisting of a chronological framework into which was embedded traditional narratives using specific language, style, theology, and following a consistent conception of history. On the basis of this definition, she identified blocks of narratives she termed “post-Deuteronomistic” and concluded:

“With the supposition of post-Deuteronomistic insertion of 1 Kings 17-19 as well as 1 Kgs 20; 22.1-38 and 2 Kgs 3.4-8.15; 13.14-21, the original Deuteronomistic History in the era from 1 Kgs 16.29 to 2 Kgs 10.36 – apart from the chronological framework – contains only the narratives about Naboth’s vineyard, Ahaziah’s death and the story of Jehu’s coup. With that…the Deuteronomistic conception of history from Ahab to Jehu is concise and consistent.”5

While Otto is right in pointing out the inconsistencies in the narrative from 1 Kgs 16:29 to 2 Kgs 10, her proposal of “post-Deuteronomistic” additions generates more problems than solutions. As she admits, “the texts are too varied and criteria concerning the arrangement of the stories are so unrecognizable that no conclusions about intention, time

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3 Hens-Piazza, 1-2 Kings, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 162
4 Marsha White, The Elijah Legends and Jehu’s Coup (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 43
and social background of the editor can be made.”\textsuperscript{6} Moreover, while suggesting that the
post-Deuteronomistic editor originated from prophetic circles, she insists that such
sources were in close proximity to the Deuteronomistic thought. Nonetheless, Otto’s
analysis confirms that various traditions were woven together by a creative editor(s) at a
later period, likely in post-exilic Judah.

Without prejudice to the other narrative material, our reading of the Jezebel story
will focus on the passages in which she is referenced, thus, 1 Kgs 16:29-33; 17-19; 21;
and 2 Kgs 9-10.

i. ETHNIC ALIENATION: JEZEBEL THE SIDONIAN (1KGS 16:29-33; 17)

The key text here is 1Kgs 16:29-33, the Deuteronomic formulaic summary of the
reign of Ahab which is heavily modified to include an introduction of Jezebel. A literal
rendering gives one a clearer sense of the intense emotions welling up within the narrator:

\begin{quote}
29 Now, in the thirty-eighth\textsuperscript{7} year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab, son of Omri,
reigned over Israel. And Ahab, son of Omri, reigned over Israel for
twenty-two years in Samaria. 30 And Ahab, son of Omri, did evil in the
eyes of YHWH more than all (the kings) before him. 31 \textit{And as though it}
were a light matter for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat,
he took as wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and
he went and served Baal and worshipped him. 32 And he erected an altar
for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made
an Asherah. Ahab did more to anger YHWH, the God of Israel, than all
(who were) before him. (1Kgs 16:29-33)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 500
\textsuperscript{7} The LXX witnesses in B and L read “in the second year of Jehoshaphat. The LXX also inserts an account
of Jehoshaphat’s reign between vv.28 and 29.
Ahab stands already condemned because he follows in the line of apostate northern kings who perpetuated the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. His marriage to Jezebel added insult to injury. The immediate consequence of Ahab’s marriage to the Phoenician princess is the introduction of Baal worship. “Here, for the first time the god’s name appears in 1 Kings, it sneaks into the text under cover of Ahab’s foreign marriage.”\(^8\) This will be the central theme of the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative concerning the reign of Ahab. Indeed, Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel and the consequent introduction of the Baal cult will provoke the Jehu purge and the extermination of the Omri dynasty.

“And as though it were a light matter for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, he took as wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians…”(16:31)

The first indication that Jezebel’s foreignness that is reprehensible to the narrator is the Hebrew rendering of her Phoenician name, ‘īzēbūl (where is the Prince?) “The first perversion of her name may have been ‘ī-žēbūl (No nobility)…then with the scribal perversion of źēbūl, the title of Baal, to zebel (‘dung’)”\(^9\) Gray believes that the original Phoenician name was most probably ‘ī-zēbūl, which means, “where is the Prince (Baal)?” and that this was the ritual cry of devotees who mourned the eclipse of Baal as a vegetation god. This would suggest that Jezebel was born in the summer when the ritual was performed. It cannot be incidental that Jezebel’s Phoenician theophoric name is rendered into a Hebrew slur. Indeed, this opening parody involving the name Jezebel, reveals a subtext of prejudice and scorn. This deliberate misrepresentation of the name Jezebel is intended to underscore the “otherness” of the Phoenician princess. In contemporary parlance, she is the foreigner with the unpronounceable or obscene name.

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Moreover, the significance of the reference to her Sidonian origins cannot be overemphasized. ‘Sidonian’, ‘Tyrian’, ‘Phoenician’ or ‘Canaanite’ are ethnic categories concerning which Israel has been instructed not to mingle. The Phoenicians belonged to the amalgam of tribes referred to generally as Canaanites in the Bible. Deut 7:1-4 expressly forbade intermarriage with Canaanites. We have observed that in post-exilic Judah, there was no love lost between the Phoenicians and the Judahites. Moreover, from the reference to Jezebel’s foreign origins, it is easy to draw an analogy between Ahab and Solomon. The Deuteronomic Historian’s judgement on Solomon is severe and eloquent:

And king Solomon loved many foreign women: the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, Hittite; from the nations of which the Lord had said to the descendants of Israel, ‘you shall come into them and they shall not be brought into you, less they turn your hearts after their gods’…and Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milkom, the abomination of the ammonites. So, Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not completely follow the Lord like David, his father. At that time, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites on the hill in front of Jerusalem, and for Molek, the abomination of the sons of Ammon. Likewise, he did for all his foreign wives, burning incense and sacrificing to their gods. (1Kgs. 11:1-8)

The narrative about the Sidonian widow in 1 Kings 17 serves to reinforce Jezebel’s otherness. There is a near consensus among scholars that the narratives of the Elijah-Elisha cycle were independently composed since they display a style and form quite different from surrounding narratives.\(^\text{10}\) This is significant in highlighting the way these stories have been deployed in the final redaction of the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative to prosecute his agenda. According to Tamis Hoover Renteria, these stories

\(^{10}\) See Gösta Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine*. Second Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 585. Ahletröm believes the narratives of the Elijah-Elisha cycle belongs to a different historical context and are not a reliable source for information on social and religious circumstances at Ahab’s time. Scholars like Fohrer, Gray, Jones and Hens-Piazza, to mention a few, all hold that the prophetic stories originate from a previously independent source.
“recorded in the Jehu legitimation cycle and then in the Deuteronomist’s late kingdom literature, are elements of a folklore that has been recorded, redacted, shaped and reshaped as part of a complex tradition discourse that emerged over a thousand-year period.”\textsuperscript{11} By the mere juxtaposition of the narrative of Elijah’s encounter with the Sidonian widow in 1Kings 17 to the negative introduction of Jezebel, the narrative highlights the desirable disposition a foreign woman should have towards YHWH, the god of Israel (1 Kgs 17:24). “Through the reframed process of comparison and contrast, the text’s presentation of foreign women becomes more complex, pro-YHWH and anti-YHWH stances are muddled. . . .”\textsuperscript{12} The Deuteronomic redactors have used Jezebel’s own people to underline her stubborn resistance to the true God, YHWH. The narrative confirms that in the Deuteronomic Historian’s ideology, the only good or desirable foreign women is the one that is prepared to lose her religious and cultural identity. The widow of Zarephath, a Sidonian like Jezebel, confesses her faith in Elijah’s god, YHWH, and although she lives in her own country, she assimilates more to Israel than Jezebel, the Sidonian queen of Israel. The Deuteronomic Historian’s narratives about Rahab in Joshua 2 and Ruth in the Book of Ruth reinforce this ideology. In the wider context of the Hebrew Bible, this ideology is further confirmed in the narrative about Tamar in Gen. 38. Nevertheless, it seems safe to conclude that the exceptional examples of Rahab and Ruth do, indeed, confirm the Deuteronomic Historian’s position that relations with the foreign woman will always involve risks to the communal identity. The narrative theme of Solomon’s foreign wives depicts this risk. Like Samson’s wife (Judg 14–16), the foreign


\textsuperscript{12} Stephanie Wyatt, “Jezebel, Elijah, and the Widow of Zarephath: A \textit{Ménage à Trois} that Estranges the Holy and Makes the Holy the Strange” in \textit{JSOT} vol.36 4(2012), 438
woman of Prov 1–9, and especially like Jezebel (1Kings 16:29ff), these women remain loyal to their origins, their own personal, religious, ethnic and political interests and, as a result, corrupt and erode moral values and disrupt law and order in their adoptive country.

As argued earlier in this thesis, Israel, the Northern kingdom, was not an ethnic entity but rather a polity of diverse peoples. In the Israel of her day, Jezebel was very much at home in her adoptive country. Like many citizens of the northern kingdom, her ethnicity was of little consequence. By skillfully weaving her story into his narrative vision of Israel as an ethnic entity, ‘am qôdesh, the Deuteronomistic Historian has successfully isolated and alienated Jezebel and her kind. Ironically, as Phyllis Trible points out the Deuteronomistic redactional genius is a double-edged sword:

“They are masters of deconstructionist strategies. Yet the subtext carries meaning not dreamt of in their hermeneutics. Jezebel and Elijah have exchanged venues to encounter different receptions. As the pawn in a political marriage, she was taken (xqî) to his homeland. As the promoter of a religious conflict, he takes himself to hers. His turf rejects her with hostility; hers receives him with hospitality. He would deny her god power in his land while readily exercising the power of his in her land. Tyranny counters tolerance; ideology destroys civility. Those who deconstruct find themselves deconstructed.”

ii. RELIGIOUS ALIENATION: JEZEBEL THE PATRONESS OF BAAL (1KGS 17-19; 2KGS 10)

14 Phyllis Trible, “Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers” JBL vol. 114, 1(Spring, 1995), 6
After introducing Jezebel as the Sidonian wife of Ahab, and connecting her immigration with the erection of a Baal temple in Samaria, the narrative seeks to counter the Jezebel effect by introducing Elijah, the faithful prophet of YHWH. The contrasts between Elijah and Jezebel, their fortunes and misfortunes, victories and defeats, will drive the plot of the Jezebel story. While Elijah represents the faithful Israelite, who is not swayed by the seductive influences of Baalism, Jezebel represents the powerful temptations of foreign cults. While one is native to Israel, the other is alien.

The religious alienation of Jezebel is, therefore, achieved in three steps. First, the Deuteronomic Historian portrays the Baal cult as foreign to Israel so that its introduction to Israel is made to coincide with Jezebel’s immigration to Israel by way of marriage. Secondly, Jezebel is contrasted with the true and faithful prophet of YHWH, Elijah. While she is portrayed as a patroness of Baal, the foreign cult, and the persecutor of the prophets of YHWH, he (Elijah) slaughters the prophets of Baal and challenges the people of Israel to a renewal of the covenant (1Kgs 18:31-39). Finally, Jehu completes the process when he assassinates Jezebel, exterminates the Omrides and annihilates Baalism (2 Kgs 9-10).

The first step in the process of religious alienation of Jezebel is established by connecting the emergence of the Baal cult in Israel with Jezebel’s immigration. As we argued in the previous chapter, the northern kingdom, Israel, was a very permissive society characterized by religious pluralism. This largely peasant society was drawn to cultivate the religious practices of their Canaanite neighbors.

“Evidence from biblical narratives and archaeological excavations makes clear that many (most?) saw no problem worshipping both Yahweh and Baal. Worship of a number of gods, each with their own sphere of
responsibility, was common throughout the ancient world... Yahweh was the God who had brought them out of Egypt and led them in battles. In the cycles of life and the seasons, however, with the need for fertility in humans, animals and crops, one turned to Baal and the Asherahs.\textsuperscript{15}

The cult of Baal was believed to be the controlling force of agriculture and the benefactor of farmers. Indeed Baal “did not need to be ‘imported’ by the Phoenician Jezebel, wife of Ahab: Baal was the traditional god (or better, god-type) of the countryside, along with the goddesses Astarte and Asherah.”\textsuperscript{16} Indeed there were many more deities competing with YHWH although the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative suggests a situation of a straight contest between Baal and YHWH. At the royal court in Samaria, “there were undoubtedly prophets of both deities, rivals because they were questioned by the king in turn and each consulted by the typical procedures.”\textsuperscript{17} YHWH and Baal shared common characteristics and it has even been suggested, since the discovery of 9th-8th century inscriptions at Kuntillet ‘Aryud that, at some point, YHWH was worshipped as Baal or in tandem with Baal and that he had a consort named Asherah. The situation has been described as syncretism since many Israelites fused elements of Baal to beliefs about YHWH.\textsuperscript{18} It is therefore surprising that Baal is not mentioned in the account of the history of the Northern Kingdom prior to Ahab. The historical evidence will seem to suggest otherwise. Most likely, the Baal cult was in Israel from the early days of the settlement. As soon as Israel began to learn the skills of a sedentary form of life, it would

\textsuperscript{15} John W. Olley, \textit{The Message of Kings}, BST. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 172
\textsuperscript{16} Mario Liverani, \textit{Israel’s History and the History of Israel}. Translated by Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies. (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2005), 119
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 119
have also needed to begin courting the favors of Baal. This is not to deny that the arrival of Jezebel in Israel may have given impetus to the Baal cult in that country. Given that Jezebel’s father may well have been a priest of Astarte, she would naturally be expected to patronize the chief deity of her homeland. Moreover, throughout the ancient world, women who married brought their deities with them to their new home. This was especially true of princesses: “A foreign princess marrying into another royal family would in all likelihood bring her own religion with her, and the king would likely honor her and her religion by including such worship in the syncretistic practices of the realm.” Whatever the case, in the understanding of the Deuteronomic Historian, this is the result of the poisonous influence of ‘foreigners’ in the midst of Israel and none can be guiltier than the Phoenician wife of Ahab. To express this, the Deuteronomic Historian makes the introduction of the contemptuous Baal cult coincide with the marriage of Jezebel to Ahab.

The second step in the religious alienation of Jezebel is achieved by contrasting Elijah and Jezebel. The Elijah cycle narratives originally belonged to an independent collection of prophetic stories, sagas and hagiologies. By mere juxtaposition (1 Kgs 17:1-24), parenthetical references (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19) and an oath delivered by a messenger (1 Kgs 19:2), Jezebel is introduced into these narratives as a foil for Elijah.

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19 According to Josephus, Jezebel’s father, also named Ittobaal in the annals of the kings of Phoenicia by Menander, was a priest of Astarte (Cf. Josephus, Ant. VIII. 13.2; Ap. i.18) See also Janet Howe Gaines, *Music in Old Bones. Jezebel Through the Ages*, (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 3.
21 See Gray, 29ff.
1 Kings 17-19 are generally considered to belong together as the main narrative block of the Elijah cycle. They “form a three-paneled artwork that introduces the major conflicts and characters of the Jezebel story and sets the tone for the entire narrative.” According to Burke O. Long, all three chapters have a similar structure: they begin with an announcement from a major character (1Kgs 17:1{Elijah}, 18:1{God} and 19:2{Jezebel})\(^{23}\); the announcement triggers a journey by Elijah (1Kgs 17:3; 18:2 and 19:3) and finally, all three chapters conclude with a transformation of one of the characters (1Kgs 17:24; 18:39 and 19:15-18).

From a literary perspective, Jerome T. Walsh believes the narratives of the three chapters, 1 Kings 17-19, have been organized around Elijah’s journeys. These journeys take a symmetrical shape, beginning and ending in the Jordan Valley and thus gives the story a sense of closure.\(^{24}\) Many commentators have also noted the strong allusions to the figure of Moses in these narratives. “The allusions are not drawn randomly from throughout the Moses story; rather, each chapter of the Elijah narrative echoes specific passages of the Moses traditions.”\(^{25}\) In 1 Kings 17, the theme of sustenance in the desert evokes the wilderness traditions, using very strikingly similar vocabulary: *the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening* (Exodus 16:8,12); the Hebrew words for “cake” (‘ūgâ) and “oil” (šemen) used in the dialogue between Elijah and the widow (1 Kgs 17:12-13) are used in Num 11:8 in the description of the manna.

\(^{22}\) Dutcher-Walls, 39
\(^{24}\) See Walsh, 283ff.
\(^{25}\) Ibid, 284
Perhaps no other narrative argues the case for the religious alienation of Jezebel more than 1 Kings 18. The unity of the narrative of 1 Kings 18 has been a matter of contention among leading scholars. While Eissfeldt had defended a narrative unity of the pre-Deuteronomistic version, the majority of scholars recognize the composite nature of the final Deuteronomistic text.\(^{26}\) Gray points out the lack of harmony especially in 18:1-16 and suggests that “probably a fuller version of the Elijah legend, or possibly an independent prophetic legend has survived in the present context.”\(^{27}\) That Jezebel is restricted to almost parenthetical third person references only in this crucial battle of the deities (1Kgs 18: 4, 13, 19), suggests her connection to this narrative is secondary. By merely referencing Jezebel’s murderous persecution of the prophets of YHWH (vv. 4 and 13) Jezebel takes an ominous backstage position in the narrative. Both Obadiah and the narrator confirm her brutality (1 Kgs 18:4, 31). Further, she is both aggressive in eliminating all rivals to Baal and powerful enough to carry out her will anywhere within the kingdom and beyond (1 Kgs 18:10). Jezebel’s sponsorship of the Baal cult is described in ostentatious terms:

“The introduction of two sets of prophets, the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, brings into the picture two groups who will act as collective characters…The specific and large size of these groups is a detail that rhetorically draws attention to the extent of the royal house’s commitment to Baal and Asherah. And the assertion that these prophets ‘eat at Jezebel’s table’ signals the direct support of the monarchy for these prophets as royal retainers and servants. This notice furthers the character of Jezebel as the one most active in support of Baal and Asherah.”\(^{28}\)


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 384

\(^{28}\) Dutcher-Walls, 33
This starkly contrasts with YHWH’s prophet, Elijah, who is fed by ravens (1 Kgs 17:4), begs for food from a widow (1 Kgs 17:10f.) and is nourished by angels (1 Kgs 19: 5-8).

The location of the contest is of symbolic significance. Carmel was, at the time, the border between Israel and Tyre. The Acco plain, a well determined geographical region stretching from Rosh Haniqra in the north to Mount Carmel in the south, was an intensely disputed territory throughout most of Israel’s history. Although it may have come under the dominion of Israel intermittently, it is safe to say that it was dominated by Canaanite ruled city-states. It has been suggested that the southern part of the Acco plain was ruled by Israel in the days of Ahab. Whatever the case, “the fact that Mount Carmel became again the border between Israel and Phoenicia suffices to explain the continued conflict between the worship of Yahweh and Baal which reached its dramatic summit in the days of Elijah.”

Gray suggests that the choice of Carmel, “apart from its significance as a kind of Palestinian Zaphon, associated with the Baal cult as a mountain and a headland, as the locus of the ordeal may have been dictated by the fact that the prophets of Yahweh were hiding in its caves and woods which were well known as a place of refuge (Amos 9:3)” Moreover, it has been established that there was, on Carmel, a significant Baal shrine. The annals of Shalmaneser III concerning his campaign of 841 B.C.E., assert that he set up a stele on the summit of mount Ba’ali-ra’si. Johanan Aharoni has argued that this mountain could on be Mount Carmel. These associations make this location best suited for such a contest. Moreover, since Carmel was virtually on the border between

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30 Gray, 390.
31 Ibid., 6
Israel and Phoenicia, the contest is given an international flavor. The significance of this contest is captured by Elijah’s directive:

“Now therefore send and gather all Israel(kol-yiśraēl) to me at Mount Carmel, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.” (1 Kgs 18:19)

This is a contest between the native and the alien, between the national deity of all Israel and the alien deities, Baal and Asherah. The narrative of 1 Kings 18 has clear allusions to the covenant ceremony described in Exodus 24: the construction of the altar of twelve stones/pillars with explicit reference to the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Kgs 18:31ff.)

The significant contribution of 1 Kings 19 is the clear allusion to Elijah as a second Moses. Elijah’s perplexing escape to Horeb, the subsequent theophany and his commission by YHWH to anoint Elisha are narrated in language and symbolism that recall Moses and his successor Joshua:

“The flight into the wilderness after offending a powerful foreign adversary by killing the adversary’s servant(s) (vv.3-4; cf. Exod 2:11-15), the abbreviated itinerary of the way to Horeb (v.3; cf. Num. 33:3-49; the arrival at a bush where he receives a proleptic theophany mediated by mal‘ak yhwh ‘the messenger of YHWH (v.4; cf. 3:1-4:17) the suicidal despair (v.4; cf. Num 11:15) the miraculous sustenance in the wilderness (vv. 6-8; cf. Exod 16:4-35, 17:1-7; Num 11:31-32) forty days and forty nights of fasting in preparation for the theophany at Horeb (v.8; cf. Exod 24:18, 34:28); the sojourn at ‘the mountain of God’ Horeb (v.8; cf. Exodus 19; Numbers 19; the ‘cave’ (v. 9; cf. Exod 33:22)…”

Nevertheless, a comparison of the two theophanies in Exod 33-34 and 1 Kings 19 reveal some sharp contrasts in disposition between Moses and Elijah. While Moses is prepared to obey YHWH and fulfill his leadership role, Elijah has a stubborn resistance to YHWH and seems prepared to end his prophetic vocation. This starkly contrasts with

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32 White, 5.
33 See Walsh, 284ff. Also White, 4ff.
the figure of Moses and has been an enigma for interpreters of 1 Kings 19. “The first part fixes upon a series of three theophanic-like signs anticipating a divine manifestation to Elijah. However, this buildup ends in a rather obscure and even disappointing finale that raises suspicions as to whether Elijah experienced any theophany at all.”

Nonetheless, the significance of depicting Elijah as a second Moses cannot be lost on the reader. In the context of the threat of idolatry posed by Jezebel, the figure of one like Moses serves to define and reinforce orthodoxy. Moses is the mediator of the Sinai covenant sealed by the gift of the Torah. Just as Moses weathered the storms of idolatry (Exod 32:1ff) in order to preserve the covenant, Elijah will overcome the threat posed by Ahab, Jezebel and the adherents of Baal and Asherah. Elijah’s final mission is to anoint the human agents who will accomplish the divine plan: Hazael, Jehu and Elisha (1 Kgs 19:15-16)

Throughout these narratives (1 Kgs 17-19), the portrait of Jezebel as a foil for Elijah cannot be missed: she is the foreign queen who drives the events of the plot. She is totally committed to the foreign deities, Baal and Asherah and fetes a large retinue of their prophets at the palace. While she is beholden to no one, she intimidates everyone, including the powerful Elijah. “She has ruled in the scenes where she is present and has remained a powerful character behind the scenes, driving the plot of the story even when she is not present.”

In these narratives, while YHWH is depicted as victorious in the situations of conflict: he validates Elijah’s prophetic office by resurrecting the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:22-24); confirms his control over nature by bringing back rain and ending the drought (1 Kgs 18:43-46) and he instructs the anointing of two kings

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34 Hens-Piazza, 185.
35 Dutcher-Walls, 40.
and the successor of Elijah (1 Kgs 19:15-17) his followers and prophets have largely been portrayed as weak, frightened or in flight. The evil power of Jezebel continues to dominate. This sets the stage for the Jehu coup in 2 Kings 9-10 which claimed both to purge Israel of the sin of Baalism introduced by Jezebel and to exterminate the house of Ahab as penalty for this sin.

The significance of contrasting Jezebel with a cult hero such as Elijah cannot be overemphasized. While Elijah, in the mould of Moses, crystallized the best image of the faithful and devoted follower of YHWH, Jezebel is the epitome of all the mortal dangers about which Moses had warned Israel in the plains of Moab: See, I set before you today, life and good, death and evil (Deut 30:15). Jezebel is thus portrayed as a threat to the Israel’s very existence. She portends death and evil for the people of Israel. The severity of her crime is evidenced in the Deuteronomistic prescription of the penalty for the type of crime she is accused of committing:

If your brother, son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or your beloved wife or your intimate friend entices you to secretly to serve other gods…do not yield to him or listen to him, nor look with pity on him and spare him or shield him, but surely kill him by your hand... (Deut. 13:7-10)

The third and final step in the process of religious alienation of Jezebel in 2 Kings 9-10 is therefore presented as the execution of the penalty for apostasy. We have noted White’s argument that the Elijah-Elisha narratives were composed to give prophetic validation to the Jehu coup. She states further:

“However, it is likely that the entire extermination prophecy, including the prophecy of 1 Kgs 21:21…has been added here by the Deuteronomist. Evidence for this lies in the narrative of Jezebel’s death (2 Kgs 9:30-37),
where the citation of the prophetic fulfillment (vv.36-37) refers to a prophecy by Elijah (i.e. I Kgs 21:23) and not to Jehu’s commission (II Kgs 9:7b, 10a). If Jehu had been issued a prophecy in the original commission, presumably the author would have had him cite its realization. Therefore, II Kgs 9:7b and 9:10a, which predict Jezebel’s death as a prophetic fulfillment, are to be regarded as part of the Deuteronomistic expansion.”

The narrative of the contest between Elijah and Jezebel, YHWH and Baal, presented YHWH and Elijah enjoying, at best, an ambiguous victory. While YHWH has demonstrated clear superiority over Baal in the contest on Carmel (1 Kgs 18), his prophet is in flight for his life (1 Kgs 19) As Patricia Berlyn observes, the “blow to Jezebel was heavy but not mortal. She still had her rank and power and could send home to Tyre for more prophets.” The decisive victory will be delivered by Jehu who is to be anointed king of Israel by Elijah (1 Kgs 19:16).

iii. CULTURAL AND ETHICAL ALIENATION: JEZEBEL THE MURDERER AND ‘HARLOT’ (1 KGS 21:5-15; 2 KGS 9: 22,30)

The narrative of Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kings 21 is perhaps the single most damaging incident to the moral reputation of Jezebel. To this point, the narrative has made generalized references to Jezebel persecuting or killing of the prophets of Yahweh (cf. 1 Kgs 18:13). In the detailed description of the incident of the murder of Naboth and

36 White, The Elijah Legends, 37
37 Patricia Berlyn, “Elijah’s Battle for the Soul of Israel” in JBQ, 40 (2012), 61
38 Note that Jehu was eventually anointed by a disciple of the prophet Elisha on the instruction of his master, (2 Kgs 9:1-13)
the subsequent usurpation of his vineyard, the reader has a named individual, a private citizen who becomes the target of a callous, despotic queen. The detailed description of her scheme, and how she was more adept in finding a solution to Ahab’s problem than the king himself, convinces the reader about Jezebel’s alien and unIsraelite cultural background, and the workings of her depraved mind:

5Then Jezebel his wife came to him, and spoke to him, 'What is this? Your spirit is sullen, and you do not eat bread!' 6Then he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and told him, ‘give me your vineyard for money, but if you desire, I will give you a vineyard in its stead’ and he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” 7And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Now, is it you who performs kingship over Israel! Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be glad, I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” 8Then she wrote letters in the name of Ahab, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders, and to the noblemen who were in his city, the ones dwelling with Naboth. 9She wrote in the letters: “Proclaim a fast, and cause Naboth to sit at the head of the people, 10and cause two worthless men to sit over-against him, and testify of him, saying, ‘You cursed God and the King.’” And they brought him out and stoned him and he died. 11And the men, the elders and the noblemen who were dwelling in his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as was written in the letters that she sent to them. 12They proclaimed a fast, and caused Naboth to sit at the head of the people, 13and two worthless men came in, and sat over-against him, and the worthless men testified against Naboth before the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the King”. Then they took him outside of the city, and stoned him and he died. 14Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth was stoned, and is dead.” 15And when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned, and is dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Rise, inherit the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, that he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead.” (1 Kgs 21:5-15)

The literary integrity of 1 Kgs 21 is very much debated among scholars. While the LXX narrates this incident in chapter 20 so that the account of the Syrian wars is conveniently grouped together, “the position of Ch. 21 in the MT is doubtless suggested by the oracle anticipating the death of Ahab, which is narrated in ch.22.” 39 However, it is to be noted that chapter 21 differs significantly from the narratives about Elijah in

39 Gray, 434
chapters 17-19. Besides the fact that Elijah enters the narrative in its sequel, Fohrer has also noted the absence of the theme of the persecution of Elijah which predominates the narratives in chapters 17-19. Moreover, Ahab emerges in this narrative not as an adversary to Yahwism, but as a king with scruples.\textsuperscript{40} As a result of these differences, J.M. Miller has suggested that chapter 21 is not primarily part of the Elijah cycle. “It may be, then, that the account of Naboth’s murder in 1Kings xx1 does not reflect a stage of legendary development which is earlier than that of the Elijah legends of 1 Kings xvii-xix. In fact, the narrative can hardly be called a legend at all. While it is not as lengthy as the story of Joseph and his brothers or the books of Ruth and Jonah, it can best be classified with them as an historical novelette”\textsuperscript{41} Miller further argued convincingly that the murder of Naboth was perpetrated certainly not by Ahab and probably not by Jezebel. Miller argued that several commentators agree that the core of the events narrated of Jehu’s rebellion (2 Kgs 9-10) was recorded shortly after they occurred, most likely, while the Jehu dynasty was still in power.\textsuperscript{42} He further argues that there is a telling difference in the details between the account of 1 Kgs 21 of the murder of Naboth, and reference to the same event in the narrative of the Jehu rebellion.

“It appears then, regardless of the translation problems which remain, that the allusion to Naboth’s murder found in the account of Jehu’s rebellion reflects quite a different scene than does the narrative of 1Kings xx1. Moreover, whether one regards the latter as a late novelette, or whether one treats it as an early Ephraimitish legend, priority in historical reconstruction must be given to the details of the Naboth affair which the author of the account of Jehu’s rebellion who lived soon after the events which he described – took for granted were commonly known. In short,

\textsuperscript{40} For the views of Fohrer and Miller, see Gray, 434
\textsuperscript{41} John Miller, “The Fall of the House of Ahab” in \textit{VT}, 17 3 (July, 1967), 312
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 309, Miller cites R. Kittel, H. Gunkel and R.H. Pfeiffer who variously praise the objectivity of the report, and A. Jespen who in his \textit{Nabi: Soziologische Studien zur Altestamentlichen Literatur und Religionsgeschichte} (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1934) 73, strongly suggested that the account of the rebellion was produced while Jehu’s family was still in power.
Naboth was not murdered during Ahab’s reign, but soon before the death of Ahab’s son, Jehoram. Indeed, one may even speculate that Jehoram committed the injustice to Naboth’s family while he was recuperating from the wounds which he received at Ramothgilead. In that case, the Naboth affair may have been one of the elements which touched off Jehu’s rebellion. The extent to which Jezebel was involved in the injustice can no longer be determined.  

While Miller’s study does not completely exonerate Jezebel of the crime of the murder of Naboth, it introduces significant doubt as to her involvement.

In her study, White makes a comparative analysis of the vineyard story in 1 Kings 21 and the reference to the same event in 2 Kings 9:25b-26 and concludes that there are significant discrepancies ranging from the type of property that Naboth held, its location, the number of victims, the nature of the crime, the time of day of the crime, the role of a prophet, and Jezebel’s involvement. White further concludes that the account of 2 Kings 9:25b-26 is the more original and that the narrative of 1 Kings 21 is dependent on the story of David, Bathsheba and Nathan in 2 Sam 11-12. She argues that purpose of the account of 1 Kings 21 is to disparage the house of Ahab:

“The aim of the retelling is to convict Ahab for capital crimes and to condemn his dynasty to destruction (1 Kgs 21:21, 23) to be accomplished in the reign of his son Joram (1 Kgs 21:27-29; cf. the fulfillment citations in II Kgs 9:36-37; 10:10-11, 17) In order to effect this aim, Elijah is cast as a second Nathan, who confronts the guilty king and pronounces the divine decree against him, later transferring the sentence to his son as a result of the king’s repentance (cf. II Sam 12:1-14)”

White believes that in the retelling process, some fictitious elements entered the vineyard story under the influence of the David and Bathsheba narrative. She concludes that the involvement of both Elijah and Jezebel in the vineyard story is of dubious authenticity.

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43 Ibid., 316
44 See White, 17. White refers to the earlier study by Alexander Rofé, “The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story” VT, vol. 38 1(1988), 89-104 in which he pointed out these discrepancies. 
45 Ibid., 17
The conclusion of White regarding the involvement of Jezebel is in agreement with the views of other scholars. Indeed, the majority of commentators acknowledge that the narrative is in two parts: 1 Kings 21:1-16 and 21:17-29. While in the first part, Jezebel is portrayed as responsible for the murder of Naboth, Elijah blames Ahab for this crime in the second part. Alexander Rofé, on the basis of the inconsistencies in the details of the narrative, and after identifying what he believes to be late vocabulary in 1 Kgs 21:1-16, argued that the two parts belong to different times. Citing the abridged version of the Naboth incident in 2 Kgs 9:20-26, Rofé notes that “the main sinners are not mentioned; not a word about Jezebel, about the notables of Jezreel or about the two base fellows. All go scot free.” He concludes that 1 Kgs 21:1-16 is a later composition prefixed to the events narrated by Elijah to transfer the responsibility for the murder of Naboth from Ahab to Jezebel. Rofé concludes that this reshaping and reinterpretation of the story of Naboth’s vineyard was done in Judah during the Persian period by scribes sympathetic to the views of Ezra and Nehemiah regarding intermarriage. “Jezebel, the sinner and seducer, is the foreign wife of Ahab. Through her, foreign women in general are stigmatized. The historical setting is the fight of Ezra and Nehemiah against intermarriage.” In a related study, Patrick T. Cronauer identified what he called the “Elijah-Naboth Fragment” in 1 Kgs 21:17-19a and 20a-b, and argued that this is the oldest element of 1 Kgs 21. He argues that,

1Kgs 21:1-16 was composed in Jehud by an author who “had access to a variety of sources and traditions from both pre-exilic Judah and from the

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46 See Alexander Rofé, “The Vineyard of Naboth” 96-97. In a parallel study entitled “Naboth’s Vineyard and Jehu’s Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination” VT, vol. 44 (Jan, 1994), 66-76, Marsha White concluded that 1Kgs 21: 21, 27-29 belong to the original vineyard story following the theme of “prophecy and fulfillment” and legitimating Jehu’s bloody coup.

47 Ibid., 94

48 Ibid., 102
period of the Exile. Among these was the DtrH within which was already found the account of Ahab’s confrontational encounter with Elijah and the resultant condemnations of himself and his entire dynasty (1 Kgs 21:17-19αβ, 20a, 22, 24-26). In the Elijah-Naboth Fragment concerning Ahab’s crime against one of his own citizens, and in the judgments and oracles (Dtr) which followed upon it, the post-exilic author of 1 Kgs 21:1-16 found the perfect parallel to one of his own major concerns/themes, namely, the corruption and wickedness of rulers both in pre-exilic Judah and in Persian-period Jehud. He therefore decided to use this fragment as the basis to create a “didactic parable” which would both express most forcefully his particular concerns and themes, and which would make explicit that which was already implicit in the Elijah-Naboth Fragment.**49**

These scholarly opinions confirm that the final text of 1 Kings 21 is the product of redactional manipulation(s). The combined effect of this redactional manipulation is the cultural and moral alienation of Jezebel. From the final form of the story, the reader understands that Jezebel has no regard for the customs and norms of Israel; she is an unscrupulous killer who seduces to evil.

The poison of Jezebel reaches beyond religion into the social fabric of Israelite society as she initiates the reversal of time-tested gender roles. “As the narrative proceeds, Jezebel is pictured as repeatedly usurping male authority and acting against the traditional social structure of male leadership.”**50** In these narratives, Ahab is emasculated by Jezebel and incapable of an appropriate response to a crisis. Jezebel becomes not only the strength but ultimately the heart and conscience of Ahab. According to the Deuteronomic Historian, therefore, Ahab sinned because of Jezebel’s powerful control over him.

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The story of the judicial murder of Naboth instigates outrage and indignation from most readers. Many commentators believe that the episode is recounted to highlight the clash of Canaanite and Israelite ideas of kingship, of citizenship, customs of patrimony and social justice. According to Hens-Piazza, Jezebel has an instant response to Ahab’s dilemma because she operates outside the religious traditions of Israel regarding issues of land. She is therefore “perfectly positioned to do whatever it takes to claim possession of Naboth’s vineyard and acquire for Ahab what he desires.” Indeed, Francis Andersen argued that Ahab’s sulkiness is out of character and may be down to his realization that Naboth’s position was unassailable within Israelite customary law and traditions. By contrast, Jezebel could not understand this. Her rebuke of Ahab, “Now, is it you who performs kingship over Israel!” (1 Kgs 21:7) has been interpreted as reflecting a contrast between Israelite and Tyrian court life and an understanding of monarchy. The concern of this narrative is to show Jezebel’s gross disregard for the traditions/laws of the land.

These texts portray Jezebel’s penchant for disobeying Israel’s religious political and social laws and traditions. She becomes the scapegoat in the Deuteronomic Historian’s reinterpretation of the story of the northern kingdom, Israel. The picture of Israel in the days of Jezebel is the picture of an occupied land. Jezebel, the Phoenician princess, is a foreign occupying force against which the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative is a summons to shun the corrupting foreign influences in post-exilic Judah and to return to true Israelite cultural and moral values. True Israelites must, like Elijah defend the identity of Israel as ‘am qadôsh. Jezebel is depicted as the perfect example of

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51 Hens-Piazza, 207.
the ‘foreign woman’, who corrupts the soul of the nation leading to divine retribution in the form of the Assyrian invasion and the catastrophe of the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E.

iv. THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL AS THE ULTIMATE ALIENATION

30When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked down from the window. 31 When Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, killer of your lord?" 32 And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, "Who is with me? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked toward him. 33 He said, "Drop her!" And they threw her down; and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, as they trampled on her. 34 But he went and ate and drank; then he said, "Pray, see to this cursed woman, and bury her; since she is a king's daughter." 35 But when they went to bury her, they did not find of her anything except the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. 36 When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of YHWH, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; 37 and the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, 'This is Jezebel.'" (2 Kgs 9:30-37)

The narrative of Jezebel’s ghastly death at the hands of Jehu in 2 Kgs 9:30-37, completes the process of alienation. Dutcher-Walls remarks that the significance of this event in the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative framework is suggested by the fact that it is drawn out and narrated with greater detail than many such narratives in the Bible:

“It seems as if the storytellers wanted to convey enough detail to draw attention to her death and make it the closure that the plot complications needed. The splattering of her blood on the walls and the horse and the trampling of Jezebel, either by the horses … or by Jehu himself … draws out her actual death in narrative time and narrated time. The narrative leaves open whether the fall or the trampling actually accomplished her death, but that she is definitively dead is undeniable.”

Nor, as Hagith Sivan notes, is the location of Jezebel’s death in Jezreel a mere coincidence:

53 The word bāh is to be read in the partitive sense, “of her”.

“Saul dies fighting in Jezreel, a locality which features recurrently on the mapping of a biblical topography whose zones revolve around alien, alienating and alienated figures.”

The death of Jezebel in Jezreel is the ultimate alienation. The narrative is part of the murderous rampage of Jehu in 2 Kings 9-10 during which he assassinates two kings, Jezebel, seventy princes, Judean envoys and a crowd of worshippers at the Baal temple. The Deuteronomic redaction presents the Jehu rebellion as a religious crusade, the fulfillment of a divine mandate (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:25-26,36-37; 10:10). From a historical perspective, Ahlström notes: “The reasons for Jehu’s coup d’état are more to be found in the foreign policy and unfortunate wars of king Joram and the threat Assyria now presented to the west, than in such internal problems as religion and morals.”

The lengthy war had inevitably affected the morals of the army encamped at Ramoth-gilead, and an injured king became a summons to insurrection for the opportunistic Jehu. In Syria, Hazael, called “the son of nobody” in Assyrian annals, had murdered Ben-Hadad and assumed the reins of government. It is conceivable that the events in Syria inspired the Jehu rebellion in Israel.

Miller believes that the narrative was written shortly after the events. “The early origin is indicated by the fact, while the author of the account made an obvious effort to acquit Jehu of guilt, he realized that the slaughter in Jezreel was still fresh on the minds of his readers and thus chose to attempt to justify its horrors rather than conceal them.”

According to Miller, the original Deuteronomistic narrative of the fall of the house of

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54 Hagith Sivan, Between Woman, Man and God. A New Interpretation of the Ten Commandments, (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 82.
55 Ahlström, 592.
56 Cf. John Bright, A History of Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 250ff. Indeed, John Bright suggests there was an explosion of pent-up popular anger and of all that was conservative in Israel.
57 Miller, 309
Omri was patterned in similar style to those of the fall of previous dynasties: Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:11) and Baasha (1 Kgs 16:4). The end of these dynasties is predicted in similar terms by prophetic pronouncements:

Those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, the dogs will eat; and those who die in the field, the birds of the heavens will eat. For YHWH has spoken” (1Kgs 14:11; cf. 1 Kgs 16:4 concerning the house of Baasha).

This pattern amounted to a denunciation of the attempts of these houses to establish dynasties flouting the charismatic ideal favored by the Deuteronomic Historian.

With the blessings of divine favor, Jehu first seeks out Joram and in reply to Joram’s inquiry, he utters one of the best-known verses of the Jezebel story: what peace while the harlotries of Jezebel and her sorceries are so many? (2 Kgs 9:22). The accusation of harlotry has been variously interpreted by commentators. Gray believes harlotry in this context is an allusion to the ritual prostitution that accompanied the fertility rites of the Canaanite Baal, while sorcery refers to Jezebel’s seductive arts, the allurement of the fertility rites for the common man. As is obvious in other instances of the use of the word harlot in the Hebrew Bible, however, the sense may well have little to do with sexual activity in this context. In Exod 34: 15-16; Deut. 31:6; Jer. 3:6 and especially in Hosea 1:2 and 2:2, the reference is clearly to idolatry. In any case, Jehu’s message is quite clear: peace can be restored to Israel only after Jezebel is eliminated.

The narrative of the final scene of Jezebel’s life is rich in rhetorical symbolism and demands closer attention. The motif of “the woman at the window” is a popular representation of fertility goddesses in ancient religious imagery. Peter Ackroyd suggests

58 See Gray, 547.
that the portrait of Jezebel at the window “is almost as if she is being presented, and rejected, as the goddess herself.” J. Cheryl Exum argued that this motif is employed in the characterization of certain biblical women (see Michal in 2 Sam. 6, Jezebel in 2 Kgs. 9:30, Sisera’s mother in Judg. 5:28): “This is an image of a woman viewed from the man’s perspective. The frequency with which the woman at the window occurs testifies to a deep fascination with her. As in 2 Samuel 6, we are outside, looking at her, inside, looking out. What is she looking at or for? At the man who created her in his image and for his self-esteem, or for some sign of his need to return to her? From her proper place, her domain inside, the woman looks out the window upon the man’s world to see what men have accomplished.” Jezebel adorns herself to await, in her domain at the window, the arrival of the man who has already killed her son and will soon kill her.

The details of her preparation to meet Jehu have also received attention. Her make-up, pūk is most probably the Arabic kuhl, a mix of “sulphide antimony, which is applied as a powder mixed with oil and is widely used among modern Arabic women as a cosmetic.” Various interpretations have been given to Jezebel’s meticulous preparation to meet Jehu. The key to interpreting Jezebel’s posture is in her words to Jehu: “Is it peace, Zimri, killer of your lord?” (2 Kgs 9:31). The reference to Zimri is intriguing. It immediately evokes the memory of the usurper, Zimri (1 Kgs 16:9-20) and his seven-day

59 Peter Ackroyd, “Goddesses, Women and Jezebel” in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds), Images of Women in Antiquity. (Detroit; Wayne State University Press, 1983), 258
61 Gray, 550
reign which was brought to tragic end. Jezebel may actually be taunting Jehu and suggesting that he has a short memory. In the larger context of the Old Testament, the name Zimri is famous for another tragic moment in Israel’s history. Numbers 25, narrates a plague that befell the Israelites at Baal-Peor because one Zimri, son of Sula took a Medianite wife, Cozbi daughter of Zur. The name Zimri became synonymous with defilement of the land punishable by death (cf. 1 Mac 2:26). Whatever the case, Jezebel’s posture exudes defiance as she faces rejection and certain death.

The rhetorical significance of the role of the eunuchs cannot be overlooked by the reader. Janet Everhart has studied the role of eunuchs in Israel and the surrounding Near Eastern cultures and come to the conclusion that “eunuchs are liminal, crossing thresholds that present barriers to both men and women. Their liminality is often a source of power.”\(^6^3\) Therefore, both the eunuchs and Jezebel are boundary crossers. The eunuchs function as an alternative gender displaying a flexibility that opens doors to multiple worlds.\(^6^4\) Jezebel would, therefore appear to be in good company. Paradoxically, they become the agents of her demise. Jehu asks the eunuchs to throw Jezebel down. The word šāmaṭ and its Syriac and Arabic cognates also denotes the remission of debts, “letting drop” another’s debts during “the year of release”, ṧe nat haššāmiṭṭā (Deut 15:1, 9)\(^6^5\) There is here a hint of “release” or “liberation” for the land through Jehu’s murder of Jezebel. No wonder that Jehu proceeds “to eat and drink”, to feast, while the dogs of Jezreel also feast on the flesh of Jezebel and the reader is left speechless at the callous inhumanity of Jehu, the divine instrument of the Deuteronomic Historian. It is not

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\(^6^3\) Janet S. Everhardt, “Jezebel: Framed By Eunuchs?” *CBQ,* 72 4(Oct, 2010), 692
\(^6^4\) Ibid, 697
\(^6^5\) See Gray, 551
surprising that he has the final word. At the beginning of the scene Jezebel had described Jehu as a usurper. Now he describes her as a curse. In recalling the prophecy fulfilled by Jezebel’s death, Jehu conflates details from two prophecies. The first, attributed to Elijah, declares that “dogs will eat Jezebel in the fortress of Jezreel” (1 Kgs 21:23) The second, attributed to unnamed young prophet, adds that “no one will bury her” (2 Kgs 9:10).

Moreover, Jehu adds a final detail not previously stated in these prophetic oracles: “and the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, ‘This is Jezebel.’” (2Kgs 9:37). Thus, Jehu’s statement serves as a climactic summation of Jezebel’s humiliating punishment.

She has been killed by Jehu, her body has been eaten by dogs, and her character has been portrayed as completely and irredeemably evil. When she dies, she is as absent from the reader’s sympathy as her body is from the scene of her death. At this point the reader must judge her not only well and truly dead, but also well and truly deserving of that death and the humiliation that accompanied her demise.66

Another troubling detail about the detailed description of Jezebel’s horrific death is the notice that when they went to bury her, they found nothing of her if not “the skull” and “the feet” and “the hands”, Kî Ŵîm-haGGulGöºlet wühärągląºyim wükaPPôt hayyădăºyim, (2 Kgs 9: 35). Naturally, commentators are puzzled by the inclusion of this detail. Narrative representations of women’s bodies tend to portray them as passive agents of male domination and violence. Various interpretations have been given to the specific body parts mentioned in the Jezebel narrative. At the outset of the narrative, Jezebel is pictured giving special attention to her head as she applies make-up and prepares to encounter Jehu in royal fashion. Now, that head is disfigured and stripped to the skull, stripped of stature and adornment. Julie Faith Parker suggests that the reference

66 Dutcher-Walls, Jezebel, 79.
to her feet may have a sordid sexual connotation. A striking biblical parallel to the narrative of Jezebel’s dismemberment occurs in another text of the Deuteronomic History, in Judg 19. Unlike Jezebel, the victim in this case is a native Israelite woman married to an Israelite, a Levite. She is dismembered in twelve parts by her husband and parceled out to the tribes of Israel after she was gang-raped by Israelite men. After analyzing Ancient Near Eastern texts dealing with dismemberment, Parker compares the biblical narratives of dismemberment of the Levite’s concubine (Judg 19), and Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:34-35) with extra-biblical parallels in the Ancient Near Eastern. She discusses two extra-biblical parallels from Ugarit and Egypt. In Ugaritic texts, the goddess Anat, consort of Baal, dismembers male soldiers and Môt, (god of death), to liberate Baal. Like Jezebel, Anat is described as grooming her head, putting on make-up, highlighting her femininity before going to confront her male adversaries. In Egyptian mythology, Seth dismembers Osiris out of jealousy. His lover, Isis, re-unites the dismembered body of Osiris and restores him to life. It is noteworthy that in both extra-biblical parallels male bodies, not female, are dismembered. Both display remarkable feminine power to annihilate male destructive forces and bring about restoration. Comparing these with the two biblical narratives of dismemberment, Parker observes:

The fluidity between male/female roles leads us to question our proclivities to find traditional portrayals in ancient texts. Strong characters are not inherently “masculine” nor are weak characters automatically ‘feminine.’ In addition to recognizing and naming the biases in the text that associate power with maleness and disenfranchisement with femaleness, we need to acknowledge our own propensities to view and

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68 See KTU 1.3
69 For more on the Egyptian myth, see Robert A. Armour, Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), esp. 54–85
often limit characters according to common gender stereotypes. Instead, we can re-read these stories of fragmented body parts and resist interpretations in which males are always the winners and females are the inevitable losers. Jezebel’s defiance and the concubine’s effort to cling to life can also remind readers of their own abilities to embody resistance against destructive powers. Although these biblical women end up in pieces, they come to life in our conscience as a call of conscience – and so they are re-membered.\textsuperscript{70}

Thus, the Deuteronomic Historian’s redaction of the Jezebel story results not only in portraying her humiliating death as an act of divine retribution, but also in manipulating the readers to agree that Jezebel deserved her fate. By inducing a total lack of sympathy in readers, the Deuteronomic Historian succeeds to alienate and completely expunge Jezebel’s legacy in Israel. This is precisely the significance of the statement attributed to Jehu: “The corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung upon the face of the filed in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, ‘This is Jezebel.’” (2 Kgs 9:37)

Lesley Hazleton sums this up very well when she writes:

Jezebel has been submitted to abjection not once but three times: she has been thrown to the dogs, then eaten by them, then excreted by them. The degradation has finally reached its limits. What the individual body rejects is rejected by the body politic; Jezebel is beyond the pale. Now the dogs’ dung will dry in the sun, to be eroded by the wind into dust, invisible to the human eye. There will be nothing left of Jezebel – no tomb, no monument, no shrine. In the minds of the biblical authors, the gods she represents have been overthrown and trampled, devoured and ejected, to be erased from human memory…In a perfect twist of irony, Jehu’s insistence that she be forgotten makes her death - and thus her life - unforgettable\textsuperscript{71}

\v. CONCLUSION

\textsuperscript{70} Parker, 183
\textsuperscript{71} Lesley Hazleton, Jezebel. The Untold Story of the Bible’s Harlot Queen (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 189
We have noted the return of the exiles from Babylon to a Judah that was in transition. The returnees grappled with the new reality of a shared homeland both with the remainees and with diverse groups immigrants of varied ethnicities, confessing different religious beliefs. In these circumstances, there was a crisis of identity and various groups offered different solutions. One such group was the scribes of the Deuteronomic History who assumed the responsibility of defining the new Israelite identity by revising, reshaping, reinterpreting its story. The statutes and judgments of the sē,er hattôrāh recovered by the chief priest Hilkiah during the reign of Josiah served as the inspiration as well as the lens through which Israel’s history from Joshua to 2 Kings is reviewed. One defining characteristic of this group was its tendency to define ‘Israelite’ by pointing out what is ‘un-Israelite’. The story of the ghastly death, in the northern kingdom, of an ancient queen of Sidonian roots at the hands of a Yahweh enthusiast, Jehu, was simply too attractive to ignore. With the skill of Arachne, the Deuteronomic Historian threads the story of Jezebel into the frame of the history of Israel, picking his spots to highlight the corruption she introduced into Israelite society. By her ethnicity, religion, cultural and ethical standards, Jezebel is portrayed as totally un-Israelite. Her beliefs and practices stand in stark contrast to the statutes and righteous judgments of the sē,er hattôrāh. Consequently, she is excluded from the community of the ‘am qadôsh.

By interpreting Jezebel’s story in totally changed socio-cultural and religious environment, the Deuteronomic Historian has presented Jezebel to be judged on laws and standards that were non-existent in her day. Jezebel’s Israel was very different from the Israel of the Deuteronomic Historian and indeed “the negative values encoded in the tale of Jezebel seem to have less to do with her Samarian or Phoenician background
specifically and more to do with the contested issue of intermarriage between a Yahwist and a foreign woman. The cultural memory of Jezebel might well have cut against the returnees to the land, at least those who had married exogamously.\textsuperscript{72}

The process of Jezebel’s alienation is perhaps best summed up in the words of Trible: “With rhetorical purity and power they subsumed centuries of traditions, diverse genres, and points of view under the severe rubric of opposing concepts: life and death, blessing and curse, good and evil, obedience and disobedience. They locked even divinity into this scheme.”\textsuperscript{73} Jezebel does not belong by virtue of her ethnic origins (Sidonian), her religious affiliation (Baal cult and polytheist) and her cultural heritage (her concept of monarchy and anti-patriarchal stance).

The question that lingers is: if Jezebel was so evil, why bother preserving her memory in the Scriptures of Israel, and in such great detail? Carey Walsh suggests a reason:

“The memory of Jezebel served an important, multifaceted function for the community’s formation of identity in Yehud. First, she badly represented the negative for that community, what they were not; what they agreed they would not be. They figure of Jezebel provided the important outer boundary for who Israel was. She clarified precisely where that line was for a community struggling to recast its understanding of itself still as Israel in the post-exilic world.”\textsuperscript{74}

The negative example of Jezebel inspired social cohesion among those who identified themselves as Yehud. Jezebel became the “other” against whom the post-exilic community differentiated and defined itself.

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\textsuperscript{73} Trible, 3.
\textsuperscript{74} C. Walsh, 313.
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Walsh’s observation also buttresses the contention of this dissertation that the final redaction of the Jezebel story took place in post-exilic Yehud when Israel suffered a crisis of identity and needed to reconceptualize itself. Undoubtedly, the portrait of this ninth century B.C.E. polytheistic Israelite queen of Sidonian ancestry, by sixth or fifth century monotheistic Judahite male scribes, is not nonprejudicial. Recovering from the shock of the Exile, deprived of temple and homeland, living in the midst of peoples of different ethnicities, the scribes are in search of identity markers for their concept of Israel. The Deuteronomic History serves Israel’s need to invent and claim its center, to legitimate its sources of power by creating an “Us” versus “Them” polarity. The Jezebel story is a significant piece in this project of the Deuteronomic Historian.
CHAPTER FIVE:
THE JEZEBEL STORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CONTEXT

A. Introduction
B. Diversity and Identity Formation in Contemporary World
C. Postcolonial Exegesis
D. Jezebel in Postcolonial Perspective
   i. The “Religious Other”
   ii. The “Ethnic and Cultural Other”
   iii. The “Gendered Other”
E. Voices of Inclusivity

A. INTRODUCTION

The Jewish community of the post-exilic Yehud was a community in crisis of identity. The imperialist policies of the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires displaced numerous peoples of the region. Many resettled far from home and among peoples of different religious ethnic and cultural traditions. In the Persian period, many Judahite exiles returned home. Judah became a melting pot of peoples of diverse backgrounds. A new era in the history of Israel was initiated. Liverani describes the situation aptly when he writes:

Despite the different strategies of control and exploitation, Assyrians and Babylonians both destroyed de facto demographic growth, intensive land exploitation, and, generally, creative and cultural originality. Without local elites commanding architectural and artistic work, promoting ideological debate, the residue of the population suffered deep cultural decline, as is well known from analogous (and historically better documented) instances of imperial conquest and forced ethnic mixing. In the space of a few decades (staggered over time, from north to south) all the kingdoms and peoples that initiated the very lively Levantine world of Iron II collapsed to their lowest demographic and cultural levels. It was the end of an epoch, the end of a world, something that traditional history books are unable to
adequately convey, but was indeed a crucial historical event, since the crisis of identity became in its turn the starting point of a new trajectory.¹

The transition from one epoch to another, from one world to another, is frequently accompanied by a sense of insecurity, and an identity crisis. I believe that the situation of Israel at that time is analogous to that in which contemporary western societies find themselves. Dislocation and migration of millions across international and intercontinental borders has resulted in increasing diversification of communities. Increasingly, peoples of different faiths, ethnicities and cultures are having to live with each other and forge a new communal identity.

The previous chapters have argued that the Deuteronomic story of Jezebel received its final form in post-exilic Yehud as part of a project of identity construction. The population of post-exilic Yehud was made up of returnees from the exile, remainees or people of the land, and large numbers of foreigners resettled by the successive colonial policies of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians. The increased diversity created a crisis of identity for many Judahites. To address this crisis, the Deuteronomic Historian selected, edited, reshaped and sometimes created a “historical” narrative about Israel’s common heritage arising from a shared faith, common ethnicity and shared cultural values. I have argued that as a result of this reconstruction of Israelite identity, Jezebel and her kind are alienated. The process of identity construction is a process of fixing boundaries, of legitimating the center and de-legitimating the “other”. This chapter reads the Deuteronomic Historian’s story of Jezebel as a colonial text that seeks to construct, propagate and protect a hegemony based on claims of religious, ethnic and cultural

¹ Mario Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel*, Translated by Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies, (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 198
superiority. It is an elitist text that endorses and advocates forms of tyranny, domination, abuse and violence against the “other”. There is growing diversity in the world today as peoples relocate for various reasons. The situation is comparable to the situation of Yehud in the Persian era. I shall explain how the forms of power and control endorsed by the Deuteronomic Historian’s story of Jezebel are perpetuated today. The Jezebel Story is a story of boundary definition, a story about separating “us” from “them”. It is also a story of every fringe person, the story of minorities, individuals and groups on the periphery. It is the story of persons discriminated against and excluded for reasons of diversity – religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, etc. It is the story of every powerless and voiceless person whose story only gets told by others who hardly know him. This is a point Hens-Piazza makes in her article, “Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms: Two Cannibal Mothers before a King (2 Kings 6:24-33)”. She writes:

The lives and destinies of the powerless, often women and children, are the carcasses left behind as debris of the teeth-gnashing escapades of the powerful…the well-being and the future of expendable persons are consumed and obliterated by the promotion of the livelihood and destiny of an already privileged class…The social framework that supports hegemonies of power and privilege effectively relegates these masses to the ‘other’. In the case of these biblical women, their only identity, that of cannibal mothers, makes them particularly objectionable and ensures their otherness.2

The significance of reading these narratives is well stated by Homi K. Bhabha when he writes: “it is those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.”3

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3 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture ( New York: Routledge, 1994), 172
From a postcolonial perspective, readers of the Jezebel discover how the text functions to set up boundaries, endorsing, exalting and legitimizing the religious, ethnic and cultural perspectives of the Deuteronomistic Historian on the one hand, while condemning and de-legitimizing and stereotyping certain identities, and how these boundaries are perpetuated in contemporary society. First, I will argue that there is a crisis of identity in contemporary Western societies due largely to growing diversity and the breakdown of traditional identity markers: national frontiers, religion, ethnicity and culture.

B. DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

When in September 1991, hikers around Tyrol on the Austrian-Italian border discovered mummified human remains subsequently variously named as Ötzi or the “Iceman” or the “Tyrolean Iceman” or “Homo tyroensis” or “Hauslabjoch mummy” or the “Similaun man”, both Austria and Italy claimed him as one of them. Subsequent testing revealed Ötzi had lived sometime between 3359-3105 B.C.E.- some 5,000 years too early to be either Austrian or Italian. Nevertheless, the attempt to claim him as part of the Austrian or Italian heritage was very significant as it reveals a “typical nationalizing strategy of usurping and taking possession of past contingencies. . . by means of transhistorical and, at the same time, de-historizing (i.e. externalizing) mythical ex post
Identity narratives, narratives about cultural or collective or social memory, focus not so much on what really happened as on what the group believes happened.5

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the rise of nation-states. Indeed, “the nation-state is a relatively new invention, often no more than a hundred years old. Much older are the religious, ethnic and linguistic groups that live within the nation-state. And these bonds have stayed strong, in fact grown. . .”6 These states tried through various nationalistic and homogenizing programs to create an identity as a means of forging unity. Narratives of common ancestral origins, of wars won and lost against enemies against whom they define themselves, are recounted and passed on. Common religious beliefs and values are propagated and nurtured.

The process of identity formation across Africa was even more labored. African states were arbitrarily demarcated as nations and declared independent from colonial rule. According to John Reader, “Africa’s colonial boundaries were decided upon in Europe by negotiators with little consideration for local conditions. The boundaries cut through at least 177 ethnic ‘culture areas,’ dividing pre-existing economic and social units and distorting the development of entire regions.”7 This process of creating and forging national unity and identity by nationalizing and homogenizing previously independent tribal kingdoms, unfortunately, also resulted in the marginalization, denigration and sometimes expunction of the stories and identities of some minority tribes in order to create a national story and identity. The stories and identities of powerful are legitimized,

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5 For more on collective or cultural memory, see Philip Davies, Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008),105ff.
enhanced and perpetuated as the national story and identity. This is the process in which a Ghanaian, Nigerian, Congolese or Zimbabwean identity is created. This is what happened to the story of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), and the story of Jezebel, after the Exile. Judah appropriated and reinterpreted the story of Israel and of Jezebel.

As Chimamanda Ngozie notes, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. . . .The consequence of a single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.”8 The Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel is one resulting from a single story.

Reader cites the example of how a certain narrative of the histories of the Zulus and Mfecane of South Africa has helped the agenda of elite minority:

The rise of the Zulus and the Mfecane were so firmly established as an explanation of the conflicts and migrations that made up the history of south-east Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century that the influence of trade was barely considered – and the slave trade not at all – until the 1980s, when historians began to question the received wisdom. In fact, the standard story of the Zulus and the Mfecane reveals more about the twentieth-century historiography than it does about nineteenth-century African history: a despotic Shaka, bloodthirsty Zulus, unrelenting black-on-black violence, migrations, and the depopulation of the interior regions were all images that suited the separatist ideologies of South Africa’s white minority very well.9

All across the globe today, there are considerable changes taking place. A combination of natural and artificial forces combine to effect huge shifts in populations.

8 This quote is from the transcript of a July 2009 TED speech delivered by Nigerian novelist and feminist advocate, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.
9 Reader, Africa, 475
The breakdown of the USSR and of the former Yugoslavia, the reunification of Germany, the Balkan Wars, the formation of the European Union, the unending Middle East crisis, have conspired to diversify populations and create identity crisis. Suddenly, the nation-state was seen as outmoded and dysfunctional, to be replaced by institutions like the European Union and the United Nations in a new firmer new world order, one that would be based on universal legal norms and in which sovereign power would be rendered superfluous.

Today, both Europe and America face puzzling enigmas. On the one hand is the push for an integration with enduring national loyalties buttressed by a common western identity. Then on the other hand is the endless deluge of migrants dislocated from a war-ravaged Middle East, a disintegrated and besieged Eastern Europe, a poverty-stricken Africa and a disaster-prone Asia. The majority of these people have legitimate reasons for resettlement. Some are forced out of their homeland by war and natural disasters, while others voluntarily move for economic reasons. While the west may be very accommodating, there is the genuine fear of being overwhelmed by immigrants with totally different ethnic, cultural and religious identities. For many, the greatest of these threats to western identity is Islam. Policy makers in Europe and America seem to be faced with the kind of challenge that Israel faced after the Exile. How many of the ‘seductive’ colonizing Muslims can they resettle among their own people without risking the loss of their national and cultural identities?

There is a sudden urgency to recall, reinterpret and retell narratives of common origins, common religious heritage and common culture. There are growing nationalist movements with increasing radical exclusionist policies. The Brexit vote, the rise of
Marie La Pen in France, the improbable victory of President Trump in the USA, are all indicative of a push towards reinventing identities by exclusivist nationalist narratives. I argue that there is a breakdown of traditional identity markers comparable to the era when Israel returned to a shared homeland with no temple to take refuge in, and facing the prospect of having to accept the universality of YHWH. *Things fell apart*, and the center needed to be reinvented.

C. POSTCOLONIAL EXEGESIS

A fundamental character of colonial texts is that the colonizer tells about the colonized, the powerful represents the weak, the one with a voice tells about the voiceless. In *Orientalism* Edward Said explains the origins of Western misconceptions about the East. According to him, colonial perspectives are first formed from reading tales of savages, monsters and barbarians in the distant lands of the East. These perceptions, no matter how wrong, are reinforced by reports, story books and even histories written by colonial tourists and administrators who spent brief stints in the colonized lands. The notions of the "difference" or the "strangeness" of these distant lands are perpetuated through the media and through discourses that create an "Us" and "Them", a binary relation highlighting the differences between imperial and subaltern values. “The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. . . ”

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celebrated French novelist Gustave Flaubert’s portrait of the Egyptian courtesan, Kuchuk Hanem, which became an archetypal representation of the Oriental woman:

She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was ‘typically Oriental’.

Said’s criticism of Flaubert is even truer about the Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel since Flaubert, at least, had some encounters with Kuchuk Hanem. The significant points made by Said, however, are the fact that Kuchuk Hanem is not given a voice and that Flaubert’s alien background makes it unlikely that he would give Kuchuk Hanem a fair representation. Both points apply to the Deuteronomic Historian’s story of Jezebel to an even greater degree. Jezebel does not get to represent herself and the Deuteronomic Historian’s social location is far too different for him to fairly represent Jezebel. Nevertheless, it is this portrait that has been perpetuated through the centuries in sermons, art, literature and entertainment.

It is the task of the postcolonial critic to deconstruct the Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel. The postcolonial critic understands that “meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to death.” The Deuteronomic Historian’s construction of Israelite identity is one such edifice, and his portrait of Jezebel is, at best, his sense of what is the case! It

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11 Ibid., 6.
is a colonial narrative by the scribes – the men with the authority to write the stories of others. It is a narrative of the stories of the subjugated, “the other nations”, the aliens, women and other minorities, narrated from the perspective of power, of Judahite and Israelite authority figures, of the natives, of men and of the elite. Postcolonial criticism must, therefore, identify the imperial center and interrogate the dominant knowledge systems of the narrative in order to expose the slander and misinformation it perpetuates for readers of all generations.¹³ Within the Deuteronomic Historian’s imperial narrative framework of Yahwistic monotheism, ethnic identification with “all-Israel” (1 Kgs 18:19) and respect for a divinely ordained patriarchal society, polytheists, “the Canaanite tribes, and women, are subalterns. This is the imperial hub from which Jezebel is ejected by virtue of her ethnic, religious, and cultural differentiation.

D. JEZEBEL IN POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

I have argued that the Deuteronomic Historian’s depiction of Jezebel is an alienating portrait. In the words of Stanley Frost Brice, it is noteworthy that there is no effort in the narrative “to deal with Jezebel for her own sake, and that she is only brought in to act as a foil to the heroes of the prophetic tradition, Elijah, Elisha and Jehu.”¹⁴ Phyllis Trible suggests an alternative portrait of Jezebel when she writes:

Elijah and Jezebel, beloved and hated. In life and in death they are not divided. Using power to get what they want, both the YHWH worshipper and the Baal worshipper promote their gods, scheme, and murder. A reversal of the context in which their stories appear illuminates the bond

¹⁴Frost Stanley Brice, “Judgment on Jezebel, or A Woman Wronged” Theology Today 20 4 (Jan., 1964), 506
between them. In a pro-Jezebel setting Elijah would be censured for murdering prophets, for imposing his theology on the kingdom, for inciting kings to do his bidding, and for stirring up trouble in the land. The epitaph for him would be, ‘See now to this cursed male.’ By contrast, Jezebel would be held in high esteem for remaining faithful to her religious convictions, for upholding the prerogatives of royalty, for supporting her husband and children, and for opposing her enemies unto death. The epitaph for he would be, ‘My mother, my mother! The chariots of Sidon and its horsewomen.’ In Elijah, Jezebel dwells; in Jezebel, Elijah dwells.\(^{15}\)

The questions that need answers are: what aspects of Jezebel’s identity and life are blurred or misrepresented by the imperial lenses of the Deuteronomic Historian? How will a Jezebel-centered narrative read? What lessons can we draw from a postcolonial reading of the Jezebel story?

i. **The “Religious Other”**

Eighteenth century Anglo-Irish writer and satirist, Jonathan Smith observed, “we have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.”\(^{16}\) Lesley Hazleton labels the Deuteronomic Historian’s narrative of Jezebel as the foundation story of modern radical fundamentalism. Comparing Elijah and Jezebel, she writes:

The two were well-matched: equally proud, equally arrogant, equally committed to their principle and their faiths. They were a dramatic clash of opposites: her sophistication versus his stark puritanism; her polytheism versus his monotheism; her policy of cosmopolitanism and détente versus his of absolutism and confrontation. Their epic conflict was to pit tolerance against righteousness, pragmatic statesmanship against divine dictates, liberalism against conservatism. It would become far more than

\(^{15}\) Phyllis Trible, “Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 114 1(Spring, 1995), 17

the story of two people, for this is the original story of the unholy marriage of sex, politics, and religion. It traces the defeat of pragmatism by ideology, and the disastrous consequences for all involved, which is why it rings uncomfortably close in the modern ear. It is, in fact, the foundation story of modern radical fundamentalism.\(^\text{17}\)

The story of Jezebel is also a story of religious particularism. Religious particularists believe only their religious views are true and should be believed. All other faiths are wrong, and perversions of true religion. I have discussed the evolution of Israelite religion from the polytheistic context of the Ancient Near East to monotheism in the post-exilic era. In the process, Israel appropriated YHWH and tied him down to a special covenant relationship. The concept of monotheism at this time also involved the understanding that YHWH is a universal God, and all other claims of divinity, including the claims of Baal, are false (1 Kgs 18:27). From this perspective, Jezebel and persons like her who believe in other gods are perverts, adherents of false gods. In his 2005 book, \textit{No god but God}, Iranian-American Islamic scholar, Rezan Aslan explains how the concept of monotheism is a potential source of conflict:

\begin{quote}
Whereas a religion of many gods posits many myths to describe the human condition, a religion of one god tends to be monomythic; it not only rejects all other gods, it rejects all other explanations for God. If there is only one God, then there may be only one truth, and that can easily lead to bloody conflicts and irreconcilable absolutisms.\(^\text{18}\)
\end{quote}

From the opening verses of the narrative (1 Kgs 16:29ff.), the reader is informed that Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel added insult to injury. From the Deuteronomic Historian’s colonial perspective, the northern monarchy was already an abomination, a sin that challenged the singularity of the divinely elected Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem. Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel and the subsequent construction of a Baal temple in Samaria, added

\(^\text{17}\) Lesley Hazleton, \textit{The Untold Story of the Bible’s Harlot Queen}, (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 5.  
\(^\text{18}\) Rezan Aslan, \textit{No god but God}. (New York: Random House, 2005), xvi
to the abomination. I have discussed the historical improbability of the association of the advent of the Baal cult into Israel with Jezebel’s marriage to Ahab. Indeed, the Baal cult, as well as other deities portrayed as alien to Israel in the Bible, was native to Israel, an integral part of the popular cult. Nevertheless, by connecting Jezebel’s immigration to Israel with the advent of the Baal cult within the narrative framework of the Deuteronomic Historian, Jezebel is portrayed as alien to the religious heritage of Israel and a corrupting influence on monotheistic Yahwism. Thus the Deuteronomic Historian delegitimizes polytheism and indeed any other non-Yahwistic faith. By so doing the Deuteronomic Historian appropriates the authority to rule on what is right religion and what is not, the power to determine the border between the “included” and the “excluded” regarding true religion.

The Jezebel story can, therefore, be interpreted as a narrative of religious differentiation. It is a narrative of religious intolerance and puritanism grounded in the post-exilic concept of ‘am qadosh, a concept that exalts Israel’s religion, but derides and de-legitimates other religions. Leyla Gürkan argues that “the special relationship between God and the people of Israel, is the raison d’être of the Jewish religion as well as the Jewish people.” She insists that this concept “erects a fundamental separation between Jews and other nations by leaving the latter on the periphery of Jewish history.”

Celebrated scholar of African religions, John Mbiti, laments the colonial perspective that “places African religions at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution. It

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19 Leyla Gürkan, The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1
20 Ibid, 1
tells us that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are at the top, since they are monotheistic.”

Mbiti argues that there are actually two competing theories of the evolution of religion. While one opinion believes that religion evolved from animism through polytheism to monotheism, an alternate theory holds that man’s religious development began with monotheism and moved towards polytheism and animism. Mbiti describes how non-African writers have labelled African religion by such derogatory terms as ancestor worship, magic, dynamism, totemism, fetishism or naturism. He concludes:

“These and the previous terms show clearly how little the outside world has understood African religions. Some of the terms are being abandoned as more knowledge comes to light. But the fact remains that African religions and philosophy have been subjected to a great deal of misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misunderstanding. They have been despised, mocked and dismissed as primitive and underdeveloped...In missionary circles they have been condemned as superstitious, satanic, devilish and hellish.”

While many western nations guarantee freedom of worship in their Constitutions, there is still considerable unease in seeing a mosque or synagogue in the neighborhood. This is especially true concerning Islam. It is true that most Muslim immigrants to Europe come simply with hopes for a better life, and that these hopes are more important to them than any apprehensions they might entertain about living in a society ruled by non-Muslims, something historically prohibited in Islam. Indeed, large numbers have assimilated with greater or lesser strain, and, in the manner of other minorities, have become "hyphenated" as British-Muslim, French-Muslim or Italian-Muslim. There are, however, organizations that push immigrants to repudiate both the process and the very idea of integration, challenging them as a matter of religious belief and identity to take up

22 Ibid., 10.
an oppositional stance to the societies in which they live. Issues of Islamic concern have been skillfully magnified into scandals in an attempt to foment animosity on all sides and thus further deter or prevent the integration of Muslims into mainstream European life, for example, the attack on the French satirical journalists of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, the notorious 1989 *fatwa* condemning the novelist Salman Rushdie to death for exercising his right to free speech as a British citizen, the attempt in Britain to set up a Muslim "parliament" that will recognize only Islamic law (Shari'a) as binding, and not the law of the land.

One form of Islamists masquerades as a call for "tolerance," or "diversity," and has penetrated right through the world of European opinion and European institutions. In Britain, a judge agreed to prohibit Hindus and Jews from sitting on a jury in the trial of a Muslim. The British Commission for Racial Equality has ordained that businesses must provide prayer rooms for Muslims and pay them for their absences on religious holidays. In a town in the Midlands, a proposal to renovate a hundred-year-old statue of a pig was rejected for fear of offending the Muslims.

The controversial Muslim scholar, Tariq Ramadan, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, is reputed to advocate that Muslims in non-Muslim countries should feel themselves entitled to live on their own terms, and that society should feel obliged to respect the choice of Muslims. Islam has acquired for itself a reputation for violence borne out of disrespect for other cultures, religions and ethical standards which almost mimics Jezebel’s persecution of the prophets of YHWH.

The crisis has prompted the Russian novelist Elena Chudinova to write the controversial book, *The Mosque of Notre Dame in Paris: 2048*, which was largely
condemned by Islamic groups. Chudinova pictures Paris completely Islamized by 2048 and describes the bleak prospects of living under Sharia in Paris. In an explosive book entitled *Reconquista ou la mort de l’Europe*, outspoken French journalist Rene Marchand declares French citizenship and the Islamic faith to be mutually exclusive. He writes, “*l’Islam est declare incompatible avec la nationalité français, un citoyen français ne peut être musulman.*”23 Even if Marchand is right, it is difficult not to hear echoes of the imperialist voice in his writings. Elijah is up in arms against Jezebel and her prophets.

The Jezebel narrative challenges policies of religious particularism and intolerance. At the same time, it challenges and condemns aggressive missionary attitudes and jihadism. It challenges readers to recognize and respect the fact that God may be called by different names, may reveal himself to people in a plurality of forms, request forms of worship different from what we are used to or demand worshippers to dress in a particular manner. It reminds us that in the realm of the transcendent, logic and reason are out of their depths.

 ii. The “Ethnic and Cultural Other”

Ethnicity is generally understood to be biogenic. Even when the stories and myths of common descent are beyond historical verification, it is sufficient that the members believe they have common ancestry. Regina Schwartz has convincingly argued the case that the biblical narratives have a proclivity for creating binary polarities as a tool of identity formation. Citing the stories of Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Schwartz argues that the biblical narrative operates on what she refers to as the *rule of scarcity*. “There is

not enough divine favor, nor enough blessing, for Jacob and Esau. One can prosper only at the other’s expense.”

By pitching brother against brother, the biblical narrative forces them to define and defend themselves against each other. These binary polar relations are especially significant because the characters are eponymous ancestors of peoples. Consequently, these seem to define and endorse the frosty relationships between these peoples. The Deuteronomic Historian’s policy on ethnic relations seem to be based on this passage of Deuteronomy:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them. You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons. (Deut. 7:1-3)

The story of Jezebel is a story about the marriage of an Israelite (king) to a non-Israelite, a Sidonian, the “ethnic other”. The biblical teaching on ethnicity is especially discernible in the various texts regarding mixed marriages. Despite the above cited Deuteronomic text, there are competing contrasting voices.

The narrative about Ruth and her successful integration and assimilation into Israelite society represents one opinion. Ruth’s declaration of her preparedness to assimilate is frequently quoted: “Do not urge me to abandon or turn back from you! for

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wherever you go I will go, wherever you live I will live, your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16) 

In the wider context of the Hebrew Scriptures, the story of the rape of Dinah highlights the complexity of the debate and the presents echoes of the contrasting opinions in the post-exilic era. In its present form, the story represents the difficulty of forging a relationship between post-exilic Judahite returnees and the remainee Samarians. The author suggests a policy of integration and assimilation. He believes an uncompromising stance will be detrimental to a peaceful co-existence between Judah and its neighbors. The lament of Jacob may well be read as a caution:

You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household. (Gen 34:30)

Some interpreters believe that it is a narrative of xenophobia. Israel’s fear of her Canaanite neighbors is the driving force of the narrative which struggles between integration and exclusion. Lyn Bechtel suggests that Genesis 34 reflects the dispute within Israel regarding the level of interaction with non-Israelites that was permissible and whether cross boundary ethnic and tribal integration was safe:

The Jacobites value a strong sense of bonding, obligation and focus on the overall well-being of the group, yet there is dissension within the community concerning how best to accomplish these values. One element (Dinah and Jacob) is interested in interacting with outsiders (Shechem,

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25 Note that Deuteronomy 23:4 appears to suggest that ethnic integration and assimilation is possible only for some ethnicities. Surprisingly, this text is oblivious of the heroism of Ruth, as her people, the Moabites, are one of the ethnicities with whom integration and assimilation is forbidden.

Hamor and the Shechemites) that show allegiance to their group values and customs. The other element is made up of militant folks (Simeon, Levi and the sons of Jacob) who are threatened by the impure outsiders and want to maintain strict group purity and absolute separation. The story seems to be challenging this attitude by showing the potential danger in which it places the group.”

Walter Brueggemann similarly thinks Genesis 34 is a narrative of xenophobia. He believes the liaison between Dinah and Shechem refers to the interaction between Israel and Canaan which he reads as a ‘seduction’. According to Brueggemann, the brothers are not interested in accommodation and cooperation, or even ratification. Seth D. Kunin believes Genesis 34 expresses the struggle in the amalgamation of peoples. In his view, the text implies that Dinah improperly joined herself to the women of Canaan and thus exposed herself to danger. Ralph Klein relates Genesis 34 to the issue of globalization. He believes Jacob’s part in the narrative is meant to reflect his role as the successor to Abraham in his vocation to be “a blessing for all nations.” (Gen 12:1-3). Klein argues that although the issue of rape springs to the fore due to the sensibilities of the modern reader, “there is an alternate interpretation of the story that allows us to enter the discussion at another point. In this telling, the issue is not about rape at all but about whether we the readers are ready to be open to the ‘other’. Dinah models such openness since she voluntarily goes out to visit the women of the region.”

Nevertheless, the story exposes the divisions and policy differences in post-exilic Yehud. It is a story of two generations: one radical, impulsive, imprudent, violent and

29 Seth D. Kunin, We Think What We Eat. Neo-Structuralist Analysis of Israelite Food Rules and Other Cultural and Textual Practices (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 183ff.
31 Ibid., 234
unmindful of tomorrow, and the other calm and conciliatory, thoughtful and anxious about a better tomorrow. The story of Jezebel supports the argument of this later group and opposes inter-ethnic liaisons.

Evidently, the dilemma faced by the post-exilic community regarding ethnicity was a vexing issue. The dilemma virtually exploded into a crisis at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah who represented a powerful section of the returnees, mostly from the priestly families, who had developed a strong sense of Jewish identity during the exile and now had to contend with settling in the multi-ethnic territories of Judah with large and powerful non-Jewish elements. They were particularly apprehensive and opposed to any liaisons with non-Jewish elements of the population. Ezra 9:1-2 perhaps best represents this position:

"The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons; so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 9:1-2).

Bechtel has argued the case that societies that undergo in-group orientation tend to discourage the development of independent individual identities. In-group orientation is usually based on members approaching life from a particular perspective on reality, or ‘thinking pattern’, into which they have been socialized. She argues that Ancient Israel exhibited the characteristics of a society that was group-oriented:

“When a society is group-oriented, most people derive their identity externally from the strong bonded group to which they belong, that is, the society as a whole and the household groups in it. This orientation influences all aspects of their thinking and lives...Since identity stems
from the group, the welfare of the group is considered identical to the welfare of the individual.”

Israel’s election and covenantal status thus appears to be both a blessing and a curse. She struggles with managing her privileged role without subjecting herself to ostracization, isolation and various forms of anti-Semitism.

iii. The “Gendered Other”

Why does a “powerful woman” seem to be a contradiction in terms? This is a valid conclusion any reader of the patriarchal narratives, authored by powerful males bent on protecting and maintaining the status quo, is certain to make. Feminists interpreters oppose biological determinism, that is, the view that shared biological features imply inevitably determined social roles and functions. Wabyanga Robert Kuloba’s 2011 dissertation has been mentioned in the review of literature. Kubola argues that like Miriam, Michal, and Jezebel’s daughter, Athaliah, Jezebel suffers a fate common to women politicians in the Hebrew Bible. Their strengths and achievements are hidden to readers of the biblical narratives recounted from the perspective of authors immersed in the values of a patriarchal society. They are judged as females who abandoned their sacred gender roles for which their narratives are told to ensure that posterity will remember them only for their wickedness and their seduction to evil. Readers of the biblical narrative cannot discern from the portrayal of these women that they had significant political and leadership profiles. In the view of the male authors, they are

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32 Bechtel, 21
aberrations, misfits whose disrespect sacred gender roles by occupying male spaces. 
Kubola is convinced that Miriam, Michal, Jezebel and Athaliah are political women.

To African Postcolonial Bible readers, these women are political characters that stand for unconventionality, radical activism, dissension and gender equality to lead their people just as their male counterparts. For trying to be more than your assigned gender role dictates these women suffer various indignities. Jezebel is decapitated, dismembered and ingested into an ideological order with strict gender boundaries and severe penalties for transgressors. The patriarchal society of Israel stereotyped women in power in much the same way that modern women who dare to participate in politics are stereotyped. They are culturally aberrant evil women who seek to destabilize the natural societal order. Jezebel is trapped in a system constructed for males only. I have noted how the Deuteronomic Historian portrays Jezebel as exceeding the cultural boundaries and roles of her gender. Throughout the narrative, she demonstrates tremendous authority that controls and drives the plot. She assumes the function of ruler while Ahab is portrayed as emasculated and ineffectual (1 Kgs 21:7). This portrait of Jezebel in the context of Israelite patriarchy, indicates she is disrespectful of the sacred cultural gender boundaries. As Helena Zlotnick puts it, “the only viable royal woman was one whose movements were controlled by men.”

Many feminist commentators have attempted to recover the real Jezebel from the imperial patriarchal portrait of the Deuteronomic Historian. In *The Jezebel Letters*, Beach pays a glowing tribute to Jezebel’s qualities:

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34 Helena Zlotnick, “From Jezebel to Esther: Fashioning Images of Queenship in the Hebrew Bible” in *Bib* 82 4 (2001), 494
“She promotes what she sees as an advanced political-economic system supported by religion, a monarchist-extractive government under a god of productivity. She works from a Tyrian model of economic empire for her version of peace and prosperity from top down, and she is frustrated at the locals’ disregard for the obvious benefits. How could they cling to their obsolete lifeways against the rising tide of regionalism?”

Discrimination and gender bias is still prevalent in many societies despite the tremendous progress made by the feminist movement, gender activists and advocacy groups.

Makhasazana Keith Nzimande laments that constitutional prohibition of discrimination and gender bias has brought little solace in post-Apartheid South Africa:

“The oppression of women by men continues unabated in post-apartheid South Africa. The constitutional rights of women are constantly violated. The incorporation of women in high positions in politics, church leadership, and other areas of South African society do not necessarily grant women immunity from patriarchal oppression. Women are victims of gross violations of human rights...there is a dire need for paying attention to the dismantling of gender inequality, stereotypes and the oppression of women in many aspects of South African and black women’s lives.”35

After centuries of progress, there is still work to do in disabusing narratives of gender bias in a world that is still largely patriarchal. Narratives of patriarchal bias today help us appreciate the fate of Jezebel in the Israel society of ninth century B.C.E. The contemporary reader must ask: how do assumptions about sex and sexual difference, gender role and expectations influence how, not only biblical commentators, but especially readers in general, respond to these ancient texts today? Can we avoid reinscribing their time and culture-bound

35Makhosazana Keith Nzimande, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The hr"(ybiG> in the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the queen Mother of Lemuel”. Doctoral dissertation presented to the Brite Divinity School of the Texas Christian University, (Fort Worth, TX: 2005), 60
religious, ethnic, cultural or gender ideology?\textsuperscript{36} We must be capable of recognizing the patriarchal bias that may suggest, in one breath, that it is alright for Elijah to murder the Baal prophets but horrific for Jezebel to persecute or kill the prophets of YHWH. Evil and morality is gender-neutral!

\textbf{E. VOICES OF INCLUSIVITY}

The dilemma of Jezebel is the conundrum to which President Clinton made reference in remarks at the American University on September 15, 1997:

This diversity of ours is godsend. It is a huge gift in a global economy and a global society. If we can find a way not only to respect our differences but to actually celebrate them and still say what binds us together is even more important, we will have solved the conundrum that is paralyzing Bosnia, that is still leading to people blowing themselves up to kill innocent children in the Middle East, that has my people in Ireland still arguing over what happened 600 years ago, that has led to vicious tribal warfare in Africa, leaving hundreds of thousands of people hatcheted to death…This is a question of imagination, of vision, of heart,… People have to get up in the morning and feel good about this country with all of its diversity, because we have to know what’s good about the differences between us and celebrate them, and we must know, too, what it is that binds us together. What are the requirements of membership in the American community? What do you have to believe in and be willing to live by and be willing to stand up for in order to be an American?…We have to visualize our future as a truly multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious democracy.\textsuperscript{37}

While the Deuteronomic Historian’s treatment of Jezebel may be described as xenophobic separationist particularism, it will be an error to believe that it represents the view of the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Remarkably, the story of Esther (Book of Esther)

\textsuperscript{36} See Exum, 9.

\textsuperscript{37} President William J. Clinton in a speech at the Bender Arena of the American University on September 9, 1977. As contained in transcript filed by www.presidency.ucsb.edu/bill_clinton.php
which is generally considered rather unorthodox within the canon of Scripture, offers some striking contrasting parallels to the story of Jezebel. Commentators have noted the two striking “omissions” in the narrative of Esther. The first is the absence of any caution or prohibition of intermarriage. Strangely, this esteemed Jewish queen is married to a gentile king! Even more perplexing to commentators is the absence of any mention of YHWH! Besides these major themes, there is also a general lack of interest in issues that most Jews would have considered critical to Judaism, issues of a homeland, the Jerusalem temple and the Messiah. Instead, the plot seems to encourage concealment of Jewish identity, encourage mixed-marriages and heavy drinking. It is, therefore not surprising that the reception of the book of Esther in church circles has been rather mixed. Martin Luther had great difficulty in accepting and interpreting it: “I am so hostile to this book that I wish it did not exist, for it Judaizes too much and has too much heathen naughtiness.”

Most orthodox commentators from Eissfeldt to Weiser to Fohrer, have argued that Esther is more of a secular or nationalistic story with dubious religious and ethical value. Gillis Gerleman disagrees. According to Gerleman, the essential features of Esther are present in Exod 1-12. Both are stories of great deliverance of the Jewish people resulting in the establishment of a national festival. Esther is, therefore, not a profane or godless tale but rather a de-theologized retelling of a prominent heilsgeschichtlich tradition. In a 2001 article entitled, “From Jezebel to Esther: Fashioning Images of Queenship in the Hebrew Bible”, Helena Zlotnick suggested that the story of “Esther was shaped as a reversible version of the Jezebel cycle. With the aid

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of narratives of the early Roman monarchy, a sensitive and sensible reading of the biblical texts relating to Jezebel and Esther demonstrates the constructive process of an ideology of queenship.\textsuperscript{40} I believe it is possible to extend the story of Esther beyond an ideology of queenship to an ideology of inclusivity that downgrades issues of ethnicity, of religion and culture in the definition of identity. The story of Esther reaches beyond the exclusive rhetoric and name-calling of the Deuteronomic Historian to suggest a multicultural world in which diversity is recognized and celebrated.

While the Deuteronomic Historian’s portrait of Jezebel as a violent murderous polytheistic queen of Sidonian ancestry serves the agenda of the elitist sacerdotal scribal community in turbulent post-exilic Judah, an agenda of exclusivism that de-legitimates and alienates elements considered foreign by religious, ethnic and cultural criteria, it does not in any way represent all the authoritative biblical voices. Schwartz makes an important contribution when she notes that:

Anyone with the slightest familiarity with the Bible will know that it is far too multifaceted to be reduced to any single or simple notion of a deity, of religion, and especially of a people...It is clear that the Bible does not conform to our modern notions of authorship, composed as it was over hundreds of years in disparate socioeconomic, cultic, and political settings. Surely such a work cannot have ‘one line’ on collective identity, one understanding of who the Israelites are or who the foreigners are. There were editors, presumably even final editors, who chose, importantly, not to resolve them, and in the process they bequeathed a text that foregrounds the many ways that ‘a people’ is constructed. It was later interpreters who, grinding their political biblical axes, violated the editors’ preference for multiplicity, simplifying the complexities of identity formation and flattening out the variegated depictions in order to legitimate claims for an identity locked in perpetual defense against the Other.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Zlotnick, 495.
\textsuperscript{41} Schwartz, 9
The contemporary world is one of increased mobility and interconnectedness. It is an era of increasing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity precipitated by increased migration of peoples across international and intercontinental boundaries.

On the one hand is the push for an integrated Europe with enduring national loyalties buttressed by a common European identity. Then on the other hand is the endless wave of immigrants from a boiling Middle East, a disintegrated Eastern Europe, a poverty-stricken North Africa and a disaster-prone Asia. The majority of these groups either have legitimate reasons for resettlement or are forced out of their homeland and seek citizenship in the west. While the west is very accommodating, there is the genuine fear of being overwhelmed by immigrants with totally different ethnic, cultural and religious identities. The increasing diversity engenders a crisis of identity in much the same way that the diverse elements of post-exilic Judahite society precipitated a crisis of Israelite identity. The western world has become a melting pot of peoples and cultures in much the same way as post-exilic Yehud. Policy makers in Europe and America seem to be faced with the kind of challenge that Israel faced after the Exile. How many of the ‘seductive’ colonizing Muslims can they admit without risking the loss of their national and cultural identities?

The United States defines itself by its diversity resulting from its origins as a nation of immigrants. It also prides itself as a nation that guarantees fundamental human freedoms in the Bill of Rights dating as far back as 1791. Nevertheless, it has always struggled with issues relating to integration and assimilation for all categories of immigrants. The major difference between the waves of immigrants that came to the new world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the current waves of immigrants
is without a doubt the fact that while the former group were mostly Caucasian Europeans and Christian, the majority of current immigrants are Middle Eastern or North African Arabs, Asians, Africans, and Muslim. The ethnic, religious and cultural differences between these new immigrants and the majority population of both Europe and America raises questions about their capacity and willingness to assimilate and integrate. How does Christian Europe and America, formed in biblical values that praise hospitality towards foreigners, celebrate the diversity of the new immigrants while forging a national identity for the common good? How should identity be constructed so that it safeguards sacred traditions and time-honored values while also accommodating and protecting the individual rights? This is the heart of the contemporary immigration debate.

The following quote from a 1919 letter of Theodore Roosevelt points out the central concern about immigrant assimilation:

In the first place, we must insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to distinguish against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person’s becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American. If he tries to separate from the rest of America, then he isn’t doing his part as an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn’t an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag…We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns out people as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polygot boarding house; and we have room but for one soul loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people.  

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42 President Theodore Roosevelt in a January 3, 1919 letter to the President of the American Defense Society, as quoted in Joseph Bucklin Bishop (ed.) *Theodore Roosevelt and His Time Shown in His Own Letters, Vol. II* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 474. According to Bishop, this letter, written two days before his death, is to be considered as Roosevelt’s final message to the American people.
In the discussions surrounding the Antidumping Bill of 1921, the Literary Digest synthesized the main lines of the debate as represented in the Boston Globe:

To the charge that the United States is threatened with a flood of immigrants, many of whom are of an undesirable character, the Boston Globe challenges with the question, ‘who’s undesirable? The undesirable of one generation is the desirable of the next’ maintains the Globe, as it points to the Irish, who ‘were undesirable seventy years ago.’ On the other hand, we are told the Germans, who, prior to 1914 were considered a highly desirable element, came to be regarded by a part of our population as highly undesirable. So, concludes the Globe, the standard of desirability is not a fixed standard in the public mind… The duty of the hour is to keep out whatever would degrade the character of our national life or impair the strength of our republican institutions. America must not be made a lazaretto, either physical or moral. Americanism must not be either adulterated or diluted by admixture with ingredients whose very nature it is to irritate the body politic and cause its deterioration, if not its ultimate destruction. The principle of self-preservation protests. That is not selfishness. It is the guarding of that which is good against the assault of that which would injure it. Judicious restriction of immigration is simply American self-protection.43

These voices express the central dilemma about managing diversity, respecting individual rights and forging communal identity. The responses have been as varied as they have been numerous. On the one hand are the responses that seek to break down boundaries. These range from hybridity to multiculturalism, from cosmopolitanism to globalization, from integration to assimilation. On the other hand, are the voices ranging from nationalism and patriotism, from “genetic interests”44 to family and community solidarity. A discussion of these concepts is beyond the purview of this dissertation. It should be noted that Schwartz’s observation that the Deuteronomic Historian’s exclusivist, separationist ideology of identity formation, though a very significant voice, is not

43 Literary Digest, May 7, 1921, 12-13
representative of the entire Hebrew Scriptures. In her 2002 two book entitled, *Inclusive Voices in Post-exilic Judaism*, Anna L. Grant-Henderson argues that there is compelling evidence in the Hebrew Scriptures that integration and assimilation into the covenant community was open to non-Israelites.\(^{45}\) Basing herself on texts from Trito-Isaiah (Isa 56-66), and on the Scriptural concept of Israel as “light to the nations”, she argues that Israel was an inclusive society early in its history. Under pressure from the exclusivist voices of the period under Ezra and Nehemiah, these voices were obscured. She believes inclusivism resurfaced only gradually in the New Testament era.\(^{46}\) Grant-Henderson also cites the examples of the Moabite Ruth and the narrative of Jonah’s mission to the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. There is, therefore no scarcity of clear and significant voices advocating integration and assimilation of Israelites. The famous ‘Letter of Jeremiah’ may be regarded as representative:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. (Jer 29:4-6)

These inclusive voices are perhaps best represented by the complementary contemporary concepts such as post-nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, hybridity, integration, assimilation, etc. A discussion of these concepts is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice to emphasize that an integral analysis of the biblical texts confirms the essential unity of the human family (Gen 12:1-3). The nomadic lifestyle of the patriarchs and the frequent dislocation of the Israelites, suggests that


\(^{46}\) See Ibid., 1-69.
identity must not be tied to a geo-political entity. “Home” may be wherever YHWH brings his people, for all the earth belongs to him (Exod 19:5). This is the perspective of Rushdie when he insists his controversial book, *The Satanic Verses*, “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world. . . .”\(^{47}\) From the perspective of the cosmopolitan, living with diversity demands mutual respect focusing on common human values. As Kwame Anthony Appiah’s writes:

“There are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person of every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way.”\(^{48}\)

Jon Berquist makes the significant observation that the Deuteronomic History is “an evolutionary story of state formation, moving from simple forms such as chiefdoms to true states such as the monarchy, and eventually to the post-state realities of imperial domination.”\(^{49}\) The Deuteronomic Historian’s project collected, adapted, “corrected”,

criticized and interpreted various older traditions from the perspective of new socio-political and religious environment of the post-exilic era. His portrait of Jezebel as un-Israelite underlines his resistance to empire and his postcolonial obsession with constructing and preserving an imagined Israelite identity in a post-state milieu.

Societies faced with identity crisis adopt various strategies. The first kind may be described as a panic reaction of exclusivist nationalism that seeks to define and reinforce borders and to exclude those deemed outsiders. The exclusivist nationalists encourage communitarianism by reconstructing or inventing a narrative of common history, common ethnicity, religion or culture. They recall, retell or create stories and legends that support their worldview and beliefs. They argue that, “without well-governed sovereign nations – strong national communities – the global system will decay into far worse disorder, and the rule of law will weaken within countries.” This is the strategy adopted by the Deuteronomistic Historian. It sought to create a new Israel based on legends, myths and a reinvention of a past that either never existed or never existed as narrated.

A postcolonial reading of the Jezebel story indicates that there are options for Jezebel to live in the new Israel, options suggested by such concepts as assimilation and integration, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, options that celebrate diversity, while defying boundaries and borders by imagining and constructing a geopolitical universe across and beyond religious, ethnic and cultural boundaries; a universe in which “Us” and “Them” become “We”.

50 Mark R. Amstutz, “Two Theories of Immigration” in First Things 258 (Dec., 2015), 38
CONCLUSION

This dissertation is about identity formation in a constantly changing world. It argued that the Deuteronomic Historian’s alienating portrait of Jezebel occurred in the context of the post-exilic Yehud confronted by an identity crisis and needing to reconceptualize itself. It contended that the Deuteronomic Historian scape-goated Jezebel, portraying her as an embodiment of all that was considered evil and un-Israelite. Moreover, it established that Jezebel, the ninth century queen of the northern kingdom, Israel, was very much at home in that kingdom. The northern kingdom was not an ethnic entity, and enjoyed great religious and cultural diversity. Further, contrary to the biblical narrative, this project sided with the research that denies the likelihood that the northern kingdom was ever a part of a United Kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem. A connection between the two previously independent states, Israel and Judah, took place long after 721 B.C.E. when the northern kingdom came to an end and large portions of its population resettled in Judah. The fact that YHWH was a prominent deity in both kingdoms facilitated Judah’s appropriation of Israel’s heritage. When Judah also collapsed in 587 B.C.E., Israel as geopolitical entity came to an end. They were a people without homeland. They rallied around their common deity, YHWH. In the period of the exile, Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian imperial policies facilitated the resettlement of peoples throughout the region. Judah was now home to a people of diverse ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations. Powerful Judahite priestly families and elites returned after the exile to this environment of suffocating diversity. The final redaction of the Deuteronomic History took place under these circumstances as an identity formation project. Jezebel’s
story was one of the narratives adopted and reinterpreted at this time, more than two hundred years after her death.

This study of the Jezebel story underscores the significance of giving fringe peoples the opportunity and a voice to tell their own stories. Celebrated Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe once said that he would be satisfied if his novels did no more than teach his readers that their past was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans, acting on God’s behalf, delivered them.¹ Colonial literature expresses prejudiced viewpoints that readers must take into consideration. The imperialist approach of giving a blanket categorization to peoples based on ethnic, religious, gender or even national differences, risks doing gross injustice to many. There can be little doubt that Jezebel had some talents. Most of that side of her story is lost to the reader bespectacled with the Deuteronomic Historian’s heavy colonial lenses.

Jezebel and Elijah are complementary characters. While their faith and devotion are admirable, their tendency towards extremism is a caution for all ages, for all faiths, ethnicities and cultures. The tendency to codify or name, localize, nationalize and own supernatural realities leads to exclusionism. Indeed, human beings are dynamic and identity formation is a lifelong project. In an increasingly pluralistic world, a vain display of cultural or religious superiority, an intractable holding on to time-bound traditions and customs, an uncompromising belief in ethnic purity, will inevitably lead to separatism and isolationism.

Jezebel’s story is the narrative of many marginalized people, the story of minorities, both individuals and groups. It is the story of persons discriminated against and excluded for reasons of diversity – religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, etc. It is also the story of every powerless and voiceless person. Jezebel’s reputed notoriety is the image her detractors like to convey to the reader. Despite her exalted status as queen, Jezebel herself is not permitted to represent herself; she remained powerless and voiceless. Conceptual absolutes in human affairs will always be prone to prejudices and consequent extremism and absolutism, exclusivism and particularism, violence and terrorism. As Jonathan Sacks writes:

The crimes of religion have one thing in common. They involve making god in our image instead of letting him remake us in his. The highest truth does not cast its mantle over our lowest instincts – the search for power, the urge for conquest, the use of religious language to spread the aura of sanctity over ignoble crimes. These are forms of imperialism, not faith.2

This study of Jezebel’s story draws our attention to the fact that religious claims and legitimation may sometimes be a front concealing poignant forms of bias and prejudice, as well as encouraging exclusivist narratives. Religious discrimination frequently justifies other forms of prejudice.

Regina Schwartz observes that, “through the dissemination of the Bible in Western culture, its narratives have become the foundation of a prevailing understanding of ethnic, religious, and national identity as defined negatively, over against others.”3 How do Christians balance patriotic nationalism with the virtues and dictates of the Christian faith, a faith centered on the New Testament which proclaims that, in Christ, “there is

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neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:28-29).

The greatest tragedies of human history, the senseless wars, holocausts, genocides and endless conflicts, have been come about because humans defined themselves as distinct from one another. Through the centuries, the voice of the Church has provided guidance to Christians down through the ages, preaching relentlessly the equality of all people created in the *imago Dei*. As Vatican II stated:

All men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all men and it must be given ever greater recognition. Undoubtedly not all men are alike as regards physical capacity and intellectual and moral powers. *But forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.*

While Vatican II was in progress, Pope John XXIII issued his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* in which he warned against discrimination and prejudice:

No era will ever succeed in destroying the unity of the human family, for it consists of men who are all equal by virtue of their natural dignity. Hence there will always be an imperative need—born of man's very nature—to promote in sufficient measure the universal common good; the good, that is, of the whole human family.

John Paul II in turn reaffirmed:

Man's creation by God ‘in his own image' confers upon every human person an eminent dignity; it also postulates the fundamental equality of

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4 See similar texts in 1 Cor 7:19; 12:13 and Rom 10:12.
5 Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29 See also no. 60.
all human beings. For the Church, this equality, which is rooted in man's being, acquires the dimension of an altogether special brotherhood through the Incarnation of the Son of God.... In the Redemption effected by Jesus Christ the Church sees a further basis of the rights and duties of the human person. Hence every form of discrimination based on race...is absolutely unacceptable.  

In a 1988 document on racial relations, the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace warned against intolerance, exclusionism and ethnocentrism:

, .. Some mention must also be made of ethnocentricity. This is a very widespread attitude whereby a people has a natural tendency to defend its identity by denigrating that of others to the point that, at least symbolically, it refuses to recognize their full human quality. This behavior undoubtedly responds to an instinctive need to protect the values, beliefs and customs of one's own community which seem threatened by those of other communities. However, it is easy to see to what extremes such a feeling can lead if it is not purified and relativized through a reciprocal openness, thanks to objective information and mutual exchanges. The rejection of differences can lead to that form of cultural annihilation which sociologists have called "ethocide" and which does not tolerate the presence of others except to the extent that they allow themselves to be assimilated into the dominant culture. 

A Final Thought:

“How do you solve a problem like Maria?”:

She climbs a tree and scrapes her knee
Her dress has got a tear
She waltzes on her way to Mass
And whistles on the stair
And underneath her wimple
She has curlers in her hair
I even heard her singing in the abbey…

I hate to have to say it
But I very firmly feel
Maria's not an asset to the abbey…

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Oh, how do you solve a problem like Maria?...
When I'm with her I'm confused
Out of focus and bemused
And I never know exactly where I am
Unpredictable as weather
She's as flighty as a feather
She's a darling! She's a demon! She's a lamb!...
She'd out pester any pest
Drive a hornet from its nest
She could throw a whirling dervish out of whirl
She is gentle! She is wild!
She's a riddle! She's a child!
She's a headache! She's an angel!
She's a girl!9

The 1965 musical drama, *The Sound of Music*, is among my favorite all time movies.
I keep imagining what a difference Maria could have made as a nun. How much more
diversity and imagination, sense of adventure and unbridled joy she would have added to
the community of nuns at the abbey. It was never to be because she was different, she
was independent minded, she was unorthodox. So, it was thought “*Maria is not an asset
to the abbey.*” She was judged an oddball and encouraged to leave the abbey. When
diversity is seen only as a threat, the world loses!

TRANSLATION\textsuperscript{1} OF THE KEY TEXTS OF THE JEZEBEL STORY

Introduction of Jezebel: (Kgs 16:29-33)

29 Now, in the thirty-eighth\textsuperscript{2} year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab, son of Omri\textsuperscript{3}, reigned over Israel. And Ahab, son of Omri, reigned over Israel for twenty-two years in Samaria.

30 And Ahab, son of Omri, did evil in the eyes of YHWH more than all (the kings) before him. 31 And as though it were a light matter for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, he took as wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. 32 And he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to anger YHWH, the God of Israel, than all (who were) before him.

\textsuperscript{1} My translation is of the MT as published in the BHS. This translation is deliberately literal, to the point of being awkward in some of the English sentences.

\textsuperscript{2} The LXX witnesses in $B$ and $L$ read “in the second year of Jehoshaphat. The LXX also inserts an account of Jehoshaphat’s reign between vv.28 and 29.

\textsuperscript{3} “son of Omri” absent in some LXX witnesses.
Another Sidonian woman: 1 Kgs 17

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, from the sojourners\(^a\) of Gilead\(^b\), said to Ahab, "As YHWH, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there will be neither dew nor rain these two years except at my word." 2 Then the word of the YHWH came to Elijah\(^c\) (saying): 3 "Go from here, turn eastward and hide in the wadi Kerith, which is to the east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to cater for you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of YHWH. He went and dwelt by the wadi Kerith, which is east of the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the wadi. 7 In the course of days, the wadi dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 8 Then the word of the YHWH came to him (saying): 9 "Up and go to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to cater for you." 10 So he got up and went to Zarephath and when he came to the gate of the city, there was a widow gathering wood. He called out to her and said, "please bring me a little water in a vessel so I may drink." 11 As she was going to bring it, he called after her\(^d\) and said, "kindly bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 And she replied, "as sure as YHWH your God lives, I have no cake but a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And see, I am gathering a couple of sticks to bring home in order to make something for myself and my son, so we may eat and die." 13 And Elijah said to her, "Fear not! Go on, do as you have said, but surely first make for me from it a small cake and bring it to me, then may go and

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\(^a\) This rendering requires pointing τῶσῆβη as τῶσ’bē.  
\(^b\) The LXX reads, "Elijah, the Tishbite, the prophet from Tishbeh in Gilead".  
\(^c\) Haplography in MT, reading ’el-ēliyāhū  
\(^d\) Reading with the LXX’s ovπί, sw in place of the MT’s ēlēhā.
make something for yourself and your son afterwards. For this is what YHWH, the God of Israel, says: "the jar of flour will not be spent nor will the jug of oil lack until the day YHWH gives rain on the face of the ground". She went away and did according to the word of Elijah. And she ate, she and he and her child for a long time. And the jar of flour was not spent and the jug of oil did not lack, according to the word of YHWH which he spoke through Elijah. After these things, it happened that the son of the landlady became ill and it became severe till there did not remain breath in him. She said to Elijah, "What is it between me and you, man of God that you have come to remind me of my sin and to kill my son?" And Elijah said to her, "give me your son". Then he took him from her bosom, and took him up to the upper chamber where he was staying, and there he laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the YHWH, saying, "YHWH, my God, have you brought calamity even on this widow with whom I am sojourning, and killed her son? Then he stretched himself out on the child three times and cried to YHWH, "YHWH, my God, please, let this child's life return to him!" And YHWH heard the voice of Elijah and the life of the boy returned to him, and he revived. Elijah took the child and carried him down from the upper chamber to the house and gave him to his mother. Then Elijah said, "See! your son is alive! And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of YHWH in your mouth is the truth."

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6 Reading with the LXX ta. te, kın auvth/j, ūbēnāh for ūbētāh of the MT.
4 Literally, "for days".
8 Reading kî with some Hebrew MSS.
The Contest on mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18):

1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of YHWH come to Elijah: "Go, appear before Ahab, then I will send rain upon the earth." 2 So Elijah went to appear before Ahab.

3 Now the famine was severe in Samaria. 4 So Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the (his) house; and Obadiah greatly revered YHWH. And when Jezebel was destroying the prophets of the YHWH, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them by fifties in caves, and supported them with bread and water. 5 Then Ahab said to Obadiah, "go through the land to all springs of water and to all the wadis. Perhaps, we may find green grass and save the horse and mule, so that we shall not destroy the beasts." 6 So they divided the land between them to go through it; Ahab went one way by himself, Obadiah another way by himself. 7 And as Obadiah was on his way, behold, Elijah to meet him and he recognized him, and fell before him and said, "Is this you, my lord Elijah?" 8 And he said to him, "It is I, go tell your master, 'Elijah is here!' 9 But he said, "How have I sinned that you are giving your servant into the hand of Ahab to put me death? 10 As YHWH, your God, lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent in seek you there. When they replied, 'nothing', he made the kingdom and nation swear they did not find you. 11 And now you say, 'Go tell your master: Behold

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a Literally “many days”.

b The Hebrew is awkward. LXX emends to “in two caves”. Reading MT singular as collective as suggested by J.A. Montgomery in his Kings, ICC, (Edinburg: 1951) 298.

c LXX and Syriac have 1 common plural, die, lqwmen, “let us go through” for the second person singular lek of the MT.
Elijah! And when I go from you, the spirit of YHWH will carry you to where I do not know, and when I come and inform Ahab and he does not find you, then he will kill me; and your servant has revered YHWH from his youth. Has it not been told to my lord, what I did when Jezebel was killing the prophets of YHWH, and I hid of the prophets of YHWH, fifty men by fifty men in a cave, and supplied them with bread and water? And now you are saying, 'go, tell your master: "Behold Elijah!' He will kill me!" Elijah said "As YHWH of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will appear before him today." So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and tell him. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah; and when Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, troubler of Israel?" And he said, "I have not troubled Israel, rather you and your father's house, by forsaking the commands of YHWH and following after the Baals." Now, send and gather to me all Israel on Mount Carmel, and all the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah eating at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent through all the Israelites and gathered the prophets on Mount Carmel. And Elijah drew near to all the people and said, "How long will you go hobbling on two opinions? If YHWH is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only prophet of YHWH left, and the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Now let them give us two young bulls. Let them choose one young bull and cut it into pieces, and place it on the wood, but do not set fire to it. I shall prepare the other young bull and place it on the wood, but shall not set fire to it. Then you shall call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of YHWH. The god who answers with fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "The matter is good!" Elijah
then said to the prophets of Baal, "choose one young bull and prepare it first, because you are many. Then call on the name of your gods, but you shall not set a fire." 26 So they took the young bull that was given to them, they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning till noon, saying, "Answer us, Baal!" But there was no sound, and no answer. And they limped around the altar they had prepared. 27 At noon, Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out in a loud voice for he is a god. Perhaps he is meditating, or may have withdrawn, or may be on a journey; or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

28 They called out in a loud voice and cut themselves with swords and spears, according to their custom, until blood gushed over them. 29 Noon passed and they prophesied till the time for offering of sacrifice. But there was not a sound; no one answered, and no one was attentive. 30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Draw near to me. And all the people drew near to him" Then he healed the altar of YHWH which had been thrown down.

31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of YHWH was address saying, "Israel will be your name!" 32 He built the stones of the altar in the name of YHWH, and made a trough around the altar large enough to house two measures of seed. 33 Then he arranged the wood, cut up the young bull and set it on the wood. 34 He said "Fill four jars with water and pour it over the holocaust and over the wood." The he said, "Repeat it", and they repeated it. He said, "Triple it!", and they tripled it. 35 The water went around the altar, and even the trench was filled with the water. 36 And at the time for the offering of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah drew near and said, "YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and by your words I have done all

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1 The LXX omits altar. Stones is not in the construct form but the MT may be defended if “altar” is understood to be in apposition “stones”.
these things.  

37 Answer me, YHWH! Answer me, that this people may know that you, YHWH, are God and that you have turned their hearts back."  

38 And YHWH's fire fell and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water in the trench.  

39 When all the people saw, the fell on their faces and said, "YHWH, he is God! YHWH, he is God!"  

40 Then Elijah said to them, "Seize every one of the prophets of Baal. Do not let any of them escape!" So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the wadi Kishon and slaughtered them there.  

41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of the murmuring of rain."  

42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink, while Elijah ascended to the top of Carmel, bent over towards the earth, and put his face between his knees.  

43 Then he said to his servant, "Pray, go up and look on the way of sea," So he went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." He said, "Return seven times and look!"  

44 And on the seventh time he said, "Behold a cloud as small as a man's palm rising from the sea." And he said, "Go and say to Ahab, 'Tie up and go down that the rain may not stop you.'"  

45 Meanwhile, the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and a heavy rain fell. So Ahab mounted and went to Jezreel.  

46 And the hand YHWH was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran ahead Ahab till the approaches of Jezreel.

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8 Reading ἐνπί. (Hebrew 'al) with LXX in place of MT 'el.
Naboth’s Vineyard (1 Kgs 21)

1 It happened after these things, Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreela near the palace of Ahab, the king of Samaria. 2 And Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, "Give me your vineyard and it will be for me a vegetable garden since it is near beside my house, then I will give you instead a better vineyard from me or if it is better in your eyes, I will give you money at this price. 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, YHWH forbid me from giving the inheritance of my fathers to you. 4 So Ahab came home sullen and vexed on account of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him, when he said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers. And he lay on his bed and coveredb his face and will not eat food. 5 Then Jezebel his wife came to him, and spoke to him, 'What is this? Your spirit is sullen, and you do not eat bread!' 6 Then he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and told him, ‘give me your vineyard for money, but if you desire, I will give you a vineyard in its stead’ and he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” 7 And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Now, is it you who performs kingship over Israel! Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be glad, I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” 8 Then she wrote letters in the name of Ahab, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders, and to the noblemen who were in his city, the ones dwelling with Naboth. 9 She wrote in the letters: “Proclaim a fast, and cause Naboth to sit at the head of the people, 10 and cause two worthless men to sit over-against him, and testify of him, saying, ‘You cursedc God and the King.’” And they

a LXX omits “which was in Jezreel” as it appears tautological.

b Reading  suneka, luyen  with the LXX in place of wayyassēb of MT.

c The word bērakta (you blessed) is understood as a euphemism for ‛arrar (to curse).
brought him out and stoned him and he died.\textsuperscript{11} And the men, the elders and the noblemen who were dwelling in his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as was written in the letters that she sent to them,\textsuperscript{12} They proclaimed a fast, and caused Naboth to sit at the head of the people, \textsuperscript{13} and two worthless men came in, and sat over-against him, and the worthless men testified against Naboth before the people, saying, “Naboth "cursed God and the King”. Then they took him outside of the city, and stoned him and he died.\textsuperscript{14} Then they sent word to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth was stoned, and is dead.”\textsuperscript{15} And when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned, and is dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Rise, inherit the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, that he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead.”\textsuperscript{16} When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it.\textsuperscript{17} Now the word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite saying, \textsuperscript{18} “Arise, go down to meet Ahab, the king of Israel who is in Samaria. See he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down there to take possession of it.\textsuperscript{19} And you shall say this to him: "Thus says YHWH, have you murdered and also taken possession? Then you shall say to him, \textit{in the place where the dogs licked} the blood of Naboth, the dogs will lick your blood, you too.\textsuperscript{20} Then Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, my enemy? He answered, "I have found you, since you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of YHWH.\textsuperscript{21} See, I am bringing evil to you and I shall burn after you and I shall cut off him belonging to Ahab that pisses against the wall, slave or free in Israel.\textsuperscript{22} I will give your house to vexation like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah on because

\textsuperscript{d} The LXX reads, \textit{in every place where the swine and the dogs licked}.

\textsuperscript{e} LXX adds “to provoke him to anger”.

\textsuperscript{f} Reading Qere aybiûme
the provocation and the sin in which you involved Israel. 23 Now concerning Jezebel also, YHWH has spoken: the dogs will eat Jezebel in the fortress of Jezreel. 24 The dead belonging to Ahab in the city will be eaten by the dogs and the dead in the fields will be eaten by the birds of the heavens. 25 Altogether, there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of YHWH, which Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He was very abominable, going after the idols according to all that the Amorites did whom YHWH dispossessed before the Israelites. 27 When Ahab heard these words, he tore his garments and put sackcloth over his flesh and fasted and lay down in sackcloth and walked humbly. 28 Then YHWH said to Elijah the Tishbite: 29 Have you seen that Ahab is humbled before me? I will not bring the evil in his days, in the days of his son, I will bring the evil on his house.

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\(^{h}\) Reading Qere aybiûa’
The Assasination of Jezebel 2 Kgs 9:30-37

30 When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked down from the window. 31 When Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, killer of your lord?" 32 And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, "Who is with me?" Two or three eunuchs looked toward him. 33 He said, "Drop her!" And they threw her down; and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, as they trampled on her. 34 But he went and ate and drank; then he said, "Pray, see to this cursed woman, and bury her; since she is a king's daughter." 35 But when they went to bury her, they did not find of her anything except the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. 36 When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of YHWH, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, 'This is Jezebel.'

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1 The form 'ittî is sufficiently attested, a combination of 'et (with) and 'ōtî (me).
2 The word bāh is to be read in the partitive sense, “of her”.
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