

Bridging the Divide between the Bible and Pastoral Theology in 2 Kings 5

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ABSTRACT

Biblical interpreters argue that the Bible is a gapped, polyphonic collection of texts. Pastoral theology argues that we as readers of the biblical text are multiple and fluid. For too long, the interpretive rigidity of the historical-critical method, with its assumptions of neutrality and objectivity, has kept readers at arms-length from the biblical text. It has flattened characters within biblical stories in favor of monologic readings, and has muted the ambiguities inherent in both reader and text. Cross-disciplinary exchange between biblical studies and pastoral theology can help us as readers become more critically aware of the multivalence and complexities of both our own stories and biblical stories as they intersect with one another during the process of interpretation.

The multiplicity inherent in the biblical text and in its human readers invites us to look anew at texts, such as 2 Kings 5, and human situations, such as immigration and forced migration, with fresh eyes. This article draws upon trauma studies within the field of pastoral theology to fill in the gaps of 2 Kings 5 in order to reveal new layers of meaning within the text. Most interpreters see the little slave girl as a pillar of faith because she wishes for healing for her captor, Namaan. When read through the lens of trauma, however, the little slave girl appears to be adapting to her abusive situation in search of security that has been ripped from her in a war raid. Reading the gaps in 2 Kings 5 with this kind of “interruption” (Fewell) challenges us to acknowledge the intersectional ambiguities in the little slave girl’s situation and act accordingly today on her behalf.

CROSSING THE DIVIDE

From my perspective as a Hebrew Bible scholar, it has taken too long to cross the divide between the so-called ‘classical’ and ‘practical’ disciplines in seminary curricula. Curricular compartmentalization has made exchange across disciplines difficult¹ and blocked the modeling of integration for students. In addition, publishing houses have balked at cross-disciplinary works because of challenges involved in marketing them, though this is changing a bit. Teaching in disciplinary silos, reinforced by financial and workload constraints, can foster fragmented learning that can lead to fragmented ministry for our students.² I experienced the value of cross-disciplinary exchange when my colleague in pastoral care, Michael Koppel, and I co-taught a course entitled “Grounded in the Living Word: The Hebrew Bible and Pastoral Care Practices” at Wesley Seminary years ago. In order to model integration of our respective disciplines in the classroom for our students, we engaged in what we call ‘partnered teaching,’ rather than team or sequential teaching, which traditionally has meant rotating responsibility for teaching class sessions, sometimes without sharing classroom space with colleagues at all. Instead, we were present together every week in the classroom, structuring the time to model a face-to-face exchange out of our respective disciplines; students enjoyed the exchange most when we disagreed with one another. We met immediately after each class to discuss what worked and what did not, and to plan the next week’s session.

That class led us to pursue and secure several grants and to co-write a book on the intersections between the Bible and pastoral care.³ One of our grants, a Wabash Center Large Project Grant sponsored by the Lilly Endowment, enabled us to assemble five teams of Bible/pastoral care colleagues from seminaries across the country for a retreat at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico; we focused on how to craft a partnered teaching course focused on the Bible and pastoral care. Out of the Ghost Ranch experience, Michael Koppel and I began a consultation in the Society of Biblical Literature on the Bible and Pastoral Theology. It morphed into a section with a wider scope—The Bible and Practical Theology—still going strong after nine years.

Several of the teams from the Ghost Ranch project co-authored articles for a recently published volume Michael Koppel and I co-edited; the articles engage in “a dynamic, interactive reading of human situations and biblical texts in order to reveal the multivalent complexities of both.”⁴ The work of these authors is wide-ranging. I present an overview here to illustrate the wealth of possibilities emerging from such cross-disciplinary exchange, and to stimulate other creative cross-disciplinary pairings. Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Bible) and Fulgence Nyengele (pastoral care) explore positive psychology and the pursuit of happiness in dialogue with the wisdom view of happiness in Qoheleth, African *ubuntu*, and Korean *jeong*; they draw on Martin Seligman’s PERMA, an acronym that outlines his view of positive psychology research. Deborah Appler (Bible) reads King David’s last days in 1 Kings 1-2 as a story of elder abuse to encourage dialogue in the United States about this “dirty little secret,” noting how family members around David manipulate him for their own benefit. Stephanie Wyatt (Bible) interprets the Shunamite woman’s grief in 2 Kings 4:8-36 through a post-Shoah lens that challenges traditional theodicy justifying human suffering in relation to God. Her “ruptured” interpretation of the text voices questions of sufferers muted by an insistence upon the redemptive nature of suffering. Jennifer Williams (Bible) uses Job as a vehicle for discussion of bullying among high school students, challenging both conventional interpretations of Job and conventional teaching

strategies. Nancy Bowen (Bible) and James Higginbotham (pastoral care) examine the contexts that shaped different biblical views of God's role in suffering and the visceral reactions to that suffering as a means of avoiding simplistic and distorted responses to suffering today. Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel mine "the poetics of care" in psalm metaphors that require care givers to engage intuition, sense perception, and aesthetic appreciation in being present with the sufferer; these metaphors can help create space for naming unspeakable trauma.⁵

MULTIPLICITY: TEXTUAL AND HUMAN

It was inevitable that Bible would become a conversation partner for pastoral care (and more broadly for practical theology) as illustrated above, once biblical interpretation broke free of the straight-jacket of 'objectivity,' reductionism (there is only **one** meaning of a text), and distancing assumed by exclusive reliance upon the historical-critical method. Thanks to feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, LGBTQ+, *minjung*, and liberation theologians, we can no longer hold the biblical text at arm's length and assume that we will all ask the same 'correct' questions of it and receive the same answers, or that one reading is normative for everyone. Instead, we are forced to reckon with the multivalence of both the biblical text and the readers of the text. Any claim to 'objectivity' in biblical interpretation must be suspect. Since the biblical text does not come with stage directions, even reading the text aloud constitutes an interpretation of it (unless we read it like we would the now-defunct telephone book; unfortunately, many scripture readers in worship still do). When we pause, speed up, or raise our voice, we engage in the interpretive process. Similarly, in pastoral caring, "therapeutic neutrality is seldom, if ever, possible. When we listen, we interpret, whether we want to or not."⁶ "Objectivity' cannot be attained in either biblical interpretation or the pastoral care process."⁷

The multi-valence of text and reader creates a frame for pastoral caring that can take place even in the process of group biblical interpretation. Fred Tiffany and Sharon Ringe produced a guide to interpretation that takes such multi-valence seriously: *Biblical Interpretation: A Road Map*. We use their guide at Wesley Seminary in all biblical courses. Their approach roots itself in three assumptions: "(1) that the text arises from particular social settings, (2) that the reader likewise reads from specific settings, and (3) that neither the diversity of texts nor the multitude of readers stand in isolation one from another."⁸ In five steps, it begins with the reader's location (rather than simply tacking it on at the end of the interpretive process) and then moves to the text's location, calling on those wrestling with biblical texts to imagine how others different than they might read the text. Assumption #3 demands that we practice mutual and attentive listening to one another as we encounter together a biblical text. If we do not do so, "we are more likely to speak platitudes, engage in moral exhortations, and offer proof texts for complex problems;" these practices "can have the boomerang effect of reinforcing negative [self] images and disempowering people from constructing their own meaningful narratives."⁹ Furthermore, our attentive listening to one another as we wrestle with a biblical text "can create a positive silence that allows stories to surface naturally rather than be coerced."¹⁰

The Bible also needed to break free from the constraints of those who viewed it as an "Answer Book" or manual for solving problems,¹¹ before it could be used in fruitful cross-disciplinary conversations. "When lists of chapter and verse are generated for issues such as divorce, grief, conflict, healing, and so

on and simply ‘applied’ (such a mechanical term!) to a problem, the Bible becomes a ‘prescription’ for ‘fixing’ the problem.”¹² Pastoral theologian Donald Capps long ago criticized such “moral instructional use “ of the Bible as a directive process that gives the caregiver an absolute authority that “can make children of counselees.”¹³ Brueggemann’s argument that Israel’s plurivocal testimony about God resists any kind of systematic organization provides a cogent challenge to viewing the Bible as Answer Book. Core testimony offers basic claims about God over time, rooted in transformative verbs such as save, deliver, create, forgive, lead; this is the God of covenant, doxology, and presence. Counter-testimony, on the other hand, roots itself in Israel’s lived experience of absence and silence; this is the God of exile, lament, and theodicy. The tension between the two testimonies marks Israel’s faith and is echoed by the Good Friday/Easter dialectic of Christian tradition.¹⁴ In a similar vein, Carol Newsom speaks of the book of Job as a “polyphonic text” containing a dialogic sense of truth in its “contradictory complexity.”¹⁵ This complexity challenges truth as systemic or monological. The unmerged voices in Job form part of the book’s rhetorical strategy to draw the reader in rather than allow the reader to remain a passive observer. Else Holt argues that polyphony is “a result of and a strategy to overcome what became the collective trauma of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, its temple, and population.”¹⁶

The polyphony of biblical texts is also found among the readers of those texts. As Cooper-White argues, “*human beings are multiple, not unitary*. The human person is more multiple, variegated, and fragmented than has traditionally been understood, either in traditional Western portrayals of the human person as a somewhat heroic, solitary figure, or our own subjective sense of ourselves as a single, unified ‘I.’¹⁷ Human consciousness participates in intersubjectivity; we are relational, fluid, and multiple beings. This view emancipates us from rigid and monolithic views of self and can open us up to creativity. Extending the discussion of human multiplicity, Nancy Ramsay’s work in intersectionality assesses “the dynamic complexity of multiple forms of inequality” residing in differences of race, class, and sexuality; these interrelated systems of inequality are “based on social (group) relationships of power and control that arise in every social location and are affected by both macro systems (institutional) and micro systems individual and psychological).”¹⁸ The multiplicity inherent in the biblical text and in its human readers invites us to look anew at texts such as 2 Kings 5, and human situations such as immigration and forced migration, with fresh eyes.

PATHWAYS TO MUTUAL EXCHANGE: TRAUMA AND THE BIBLE

“All theology, but especially pastoral theology, begins with human beings ... Pastoral theology takes suffering as its starting place...” (Pamela Cooper-White)¹⁹

The impetus for my long-standing interest in the intersections between the Bible and pastoral theology came from my beloved brother’s drowning death (on my mother’s birthday, no less) when he was just 23 and I was 27; he was my only sibling. In the middle of a PhD program in Bible at Vanderbilt at the time, I clung to Walter Brueggemann’s insistence upon “post-critical” investigation of the function

of the psalms (to articulate seasons of faith—orientation, disorientation, and new orientation) in the life of believing communities,²⁰ to help me deal with my brother's death.²¹ I discovered in my grief that the Bible is uniquely positioned as a conversation partner with pastoral theology because its compelling story offers us characters with whom we can identify and link our own stories, as well as metaphor-anchored poetry that is evocative and performative.²² The Bible can “story” our lives, that is, organize our human experience in relation to God, as Ed Wimberly puts it.²³ The lament psalms helped me to ‘story’ my suffering and consequently, to look for loss and trauma experienced by biblical characters that had been muted by interpreters, as for example in the story of the little slave girl in 2 Kings 5.

Recent cross-disciplinary conversation between the Bible and trauma studies argues, as David Carr puts it, that “the Jewish and Christian Bibles both emerged as responses to suffering, particularly group suffering.”²⁴ The Bible emerged as survival literature for ancient Israel and the early church as they endured centuries of trauma caused by war, invasion, forced migration, and colonization. In Israel's case, “the suffering servant, daughter of Zion, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah stand as examples of the processing of exilic trauma through depiction of individual figures to whom exiles could relate.”²⁵ For the church, the apostle Paul took Christ's crucifixion as a model for his own suffering. “In this way, the trauma of the cross and Paul's own trauma became a paradigm for Christian living in general.”²⁶ Nancy Bowen used trauma studies as a lens for her commentary on Ezekiel,²⁷ as did Kathleen O'Connor in her study of Jeremiah,²⁸ whom she calls a “model survivor” of trauma. Trauma studies in conversation with biblical interpretation has framed the exploration of so-called “problematic” (read “violent”) texts in the Bible, and that conversation has been extended to other texts, including Job, Qoheleth, Lamentations, and 2 Corinthians.²⁹ I want to uncover the violence that is embedded in 2 Kings 5 but is often overlooked.

In light of our multiplicity and intersectionality, however, we must take care not to engage in “selective storying”³⁰ of biblical texts, that is, creating a canon within a canon of our favorites by identifying with those stories (or their interpretations) that make us comfortable, affirm our self-image, or support the status quo, while avoiding those texts (or their interpretations) that challenge us and criticize power structures. I argue that interpreters have engaged in selective storying in their readings of 2 Kings 5 by avoiding the ugly realities of war and confining the little slave girl to a cocoon of faith.

2 KINGS 5: MIDRASH THROUGH THE LENS OF TRAUMA

GAPPED TEXT AND MIDRASH

The Bible invites our dialogue with it because it is a “gapped text”³¹ with missing details, silent characters, and purposeful word choice. The gaps prompt our questions and gap-filling, which the rabbis in the Talmud practiced as midrash (from the Hebrew verb meaning “to seek, inquire”). Midrash “assumes that the text has multiple meanings and is relentlessly open to rereading.”³² Midrash also creates a web of interrelated texts that are in conversation with one another and encourage imaginative reading. For the Rabbis the Torah was a combination of black fire (the letters, words, and verses in ink on the page) and white

fire (the spaces between the letter, words, and verses).³³

Midrash can take many forms. Wilda Gafney argues in *Womanist Midrash* that midrash is “the fertile creative space where the preacher-interpreter enters the text, particularly the spaces in the text, and fills them out with missing details . . .”³⁴ Gafney fills in the details from black women’s experiences. She argues that the “sanctified imagination” of black preaching is “a type of African American indigenous midrash.”³⁵ Bibliodrama, developed by Peter Pitzele,³⁶ offers another way to connect to the biblical text and fill in the gaps. As a contemporary form of midrash, readers can become characters in the biblical story through a form of role-playing that encourages improvisation rather than acting from a script. Ultimately, every biblical text is an intersection with other texts and offers “an indeterminate surplus of meaningful possibilities. Interpretation is always a production of meaning from that surplus.”³⁷

Danna Fewell also emphasizes the importance of gaps in the biblical text. She argues that many texts leave room for and invite “interruption.” “As a strategy of reading, interruption is a way of stopping and questioning the text—of recognizing that, ethically, something is amiss in what we are being told.”³⁸ The questioning can lead to imagining the story being told differently and one’s life being lived differently in light of that questioning. Refusing to be a passive reader, Fewell interrupts stories such as the flood and the exilic divorce of foreign wives both for the sake of the children in those biblical narratives and for children today. Similarly, Eric Seibert in his study of divine violence in the Bible asks us to decide what kind of readers we are: “compliant readers” who trustingly accept the Bible’s claims, values, and assumptions, taking the text “as is,” or “conversant readers” who actively engage with the text, critically evaluate it, and resist what is dehumanizing in it.³⁹ Seibert claims the “compliance is typically the default mode of readers who grow up in the church” and of commentators who confine themselves to explaining the text and suppressing questions of its value.⁴⁰ As we shall see in the next section, readers have too often been both “compliant” when reading the story of the little slave girl in 2 Kings 5 and reluctant to “interrupt” the text on her behalf and on behalf of endangered children everywhere.

LOOKING AGAIN AT THE LITTLE SLAVE GIRL

I want to demonstrate here how the Bible/pastoral care conversation can uncover a layer of meaning repeatedly overlooked in 2 Kings 5, the story of the healing of Naaman,⁴¹ buried under the weight of monological interpretation. Using the lens of trauma studies to frame my exploration, I focus not on Naaman or the prophet Elisha, but rather upon the young Israelite captive girl who served Naaman’s wife (v 2). I had always been dissatisfied with and a bit suspicious of myriad interpretations that put the little girl on a pedestal, creating a kind of “Super Girl” of faith in our biblical imagination. 2 Kings 5, filled with reversals, contrasts, irony, and humor, forms part of the Elisha cycle of miracle stories beginning with 2 Kings 2:13, when Elisha puts on his predecessor Elijah’s mantle. Jesus cites 2 Kings 5:1–14 about the foreigner Naaman’s healing and conversion in his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk 4:27). Consequently, many interpreters focus on the themes of God’s universal power and grace in 2 Kings 5 as a foreshadowing and affirmation of Jesus’ inclusive ministry. Often overlooked is the role played by the captive slave girl in the story. When attention is paid to her, she is usually romanticized beyond human recognition.

Any investigation of 2 Kings 5 must reckon with its place in the Deuteronomistic History (Josh–2 Kgs). Edited in the exilic period, this history interprets events theologically against the standards of covenant obedience and a kingdom united under the Davidic monarchy. This collection was meant to offer hope to traumatized exiles by making sense of what happened to them: God gave the enemy victory over Israel as punishment for covenant disobedience and the split in the kingdom (see 2 Kgs 17:5–7; 2 Kgs 24:20). Tiffany Houck-Loomis terms this interpretation a “dominant exilic trope” that “arose as a necessary means of survival during the exile. However, this narrative became concretized within the dominant history of Israel in a way that understood today, further ostracizes one from mourning the effects of intergenerational and prolonged trauma and potentially inhibits one’s experience of the God beyond the narrative.”⁴² In addition, we are reminded by Gerald West to search for ‘hidden transcripts’ of the marginalized that are co-opted in this text by its place in the Deuteronomistic History. West, building on James Scott’s work, warns that that “the public transcript” in a text probably does not tell the whole story of power relations; it is “the hidden transcript” that reveals forms of resistance. “Unless one can penetrate the official transcript of both subordinates and elites, a reading of the social evidence will almost always represent a confirmation of the status quo in hegemonic terms.”⁴³ Marginalized voices can reveal the struggle over power in the text on many levels. Interpreters of 2 Kings 5 have largely ignored that struggle and the dynamic complexity of the text in favor of a simplicity that flattens characters and makes for a comfortable reading.

Contrasts present themselves in verse 1, where we meet Naaman, commander of the Aramean (Syrian) army, who is called “a great/big man” (*’ish gādol*) and “mighty warrior.”⁴⁴ Yet Naaman’s power is threatened by what translators call “leprosy” (*šāra ‘at*). How ironic, since Naaman’s name means “pleasant.” Despite his power, Naaman cannot cure his illness. He probably does not have actual leprosy (Hansen’s disease), but rather one of several types of skin diseases that carries a social stigma and makes one ritually impure. The Deuteronomistic concern with God’s universal sovereignty as a hopeful word to the exiles also expresses itself in verse 1, in which the narrator declares: “by him [Namaan] the LORD had given victory to Aram.” God uses foreign nations and their leaders to punish disobedient Israel. Divine power mocks royal power in both Israel and Aram with comic portrayals of each land’s king. Aram’s king arrogantly sends a letter and gifts to Israel’s king and directs him to cure Naaman (vv 5–6), while Israel’s king panics and tears his robes, fearing the command, which he cannot fulfill, presents a pretext for war (v 7).

THE LITTLE GIRL ON A PEDESTAL

Namaan’s powerful masculinity in verse 1, linked with the violence of war, is contrasted in verse 2 with the vulnerability of a nameless “little girl” (*na ‘ārā qəṭānnā*) taken captive during an Aramean raid of Israel. This little one “serves” or is enslaved to, Naaman’s wife (the Hebrew uses only the verb *hāyāh* with the locative preposition *lipnē*: literally: ‘she was before the wife of Namaan’). Israel itself knows about taking captives; Deuteronomy 20:14 allows Israel to “take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you” (cf. foreign raids of Israel in 1 Sam 30:1–3; 2 Kgs 13:20; 24:2).

Interpreters romanticize the little girl in various ways, focusing on her wish in verse 3: “If only⁴⁵ my

lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” Verse 3 presents “the public transcript” (that is, the Deuteronomistic view) of the little girl’s situation: accept your punishment and “pray for the welfare of the city where I have sent you” (Jer 29:7). The text does not tell us why she suggests a cure for Naaman. This gap in the text invites us to speculate as to the reason for her suggestion, and thus challenges the objectivity that some promote as the goal of biblical interpretation. It is in this gap and in the space between verse 2 (describing her status as captive) and verse 3 (her wish for Naaman’s healing) that we find “the hidden transcript” of the text and a glimpse of the trauma of war. It is this gap that reminds us of our multiplicity as readers and the complexities of intersectionality lurking in every biblical text.

Because she believes in Elisha’s power to heal her master, the little slave girl is put on a pedestal by most commentators, obscuring the hidden transcript in her story. These interpretations do fight against an “objective” reading of the text by seeing her great faith in the gaps of the text, but one must consider whether more than one non-objective reading is possible. A review of recent interpretations of the little girl’s situation will show how entrenched this comfortable, faith-affirming approach to the little girl is. Compliant readings abound. Esther Menn argues, for example, that “in a time of killing and destruction, she [the little girl] focuses her attention on healing and restoration, even for the military leader on the other side;” her heart is “full of compassion” even for the enemy responsible for her captivity.⁴⁶ Menn concludes: “that a little Israelite servant girl should have such insight points to the perceptiveness of children about matters of faith.”⁴⁷ Jean Kyoung Kim, in her midrashic retelling of the story, insists that “[d]espite her insignificance and obscurity, the little girl becomes the first instrument of God in the narrative,”⁴⁸ replacing Elisha’s servant Gehazi (both are described by the word *na’ar*, servant) because she understands the prophet’s healing powers while he does not. Julie Faith Parker calls the little girl “unique in the Elisha cycle” and maintains that she takes initiative, “possesses the courage of conviction,” “incarnates vulnerability, and yet acts with the compassion and magnanimity that befit greatness.”⁴⁹ She is “a paragon of respect, composure, knowledge, and wisdom”⁵⁰ in comparison to the Israelite king.

Those who interpret and preach from this text often surrender the little girl to their larger theological point. Barbara Lundblad, for example, asks “what might the mighty learn from other peoples, from the small?”⁵¹ Naaman would never have been healed if he hadn’t listened to those who had no power. Stephen Farris rightly sees echoes of Elijah’s miracles for Gentiles in the Elisha cycle, but notes that the exiled little girl does not hate her captors (just as Pharaoh’s daughter who adopted Moses chose not to hate); instead she embodies those “quiet, loving people doing God’s work.”⁵² Farris’ theological point is that if God’s grace is always for those on the underside, it becomes predictable; grace “is just there when we least expect it.”⁵³ In a similar vein, even Walter Brueggemann waxes rhapsodic about the little girl to underscore his theological point that the good news always shatters contexts and is unexpected: “And while she herself is a war captive pressed into service, she is not mean-spirited. She makes the best of her situation and even cares about the general’s wife and, consequently, she cares about the general.”⁵⁴ Brueggemann names her a true evangelist because she spoke what she remembered and believed about Elijah and saw the possibility of a different future for Naaman.

In his NIB commentary on 1 and 2 Kings, Choon-Leong Seow uses the little girl primarily as a

foil—a foil for the king of Israel (who does not know what she knows, that a prophet in Samaria can heal), for Elisha’s servant Gehazi (who is a greedy opportunist in contrast to the little girl’s hope and faith), and for Naaman—“this Israelite captive would bring hope for her Aramean captor”⁵⁵ and demonstrate to the exiles hearing the story that greater good can come from captivity. For Cheryl Strimple and Ovidiu Creanga, the little girl functions as part of a “structuring motif” in a study of the “contested concept” of masculinity in 2 Kings 5.⁵⁶ They come closer to the hidden transcript in the story but ultimately settle on the overarching Deuteronomistic theological point. The little girl stands “before” (*lipnē*) Naaman’s wife (v 2) as she wishes Naaman would stand “before” (*lipnē*) the prophet (v 3); this repeated word establishes a hierarchy of social and political relations, while the combination of the preposition and the verb “to stand” (*‘amad*) in verses 11, 15, 16, and 25 establishes a structure of loyalty and male power. Insiders (Gehazi) and outsiders (Naaman) change places via the vehicle of disability (skin disease; v 27; I note a similar reversal in Josh 2 and 7 with Rahab and Achan).

CHILDREN AS SPOILS OF WAR

The little girl in these interpretations seems to tell the exiles what they yearn to hear: that God works across national boundaries for restoration. The same desire seems to drive interpretations of Rahab in Joshua 2.⁵⁷ No one has suggested that perhaps she seeks revenge by sending Naaman back into Israelite territory, where resentment surely lingers after his victory; such a view would knock her off her evangelistic pedestal. The hidden transcript here suggests that her voice has been co-opted to make a theological point about God’s sovereignty over all political power. I contend that the point is made at the little girl’s expense; her trauma is glossed over⁵⁸ in subservience to a larger purpose: survival. Throughout history, women and children as spoils of war have understood the brutality of war that drowns out hope (cf. Jael and Sisera’s mother in Judges 5 and Daughter Zion in Lamentations). In our recent history, children have been recruited to serve in rebel armies and young girls have been sexually abused by soldiers. Modern examples of children caught in the cross hairs of political strife abound: in Mali, the Sudan, the former Yugoslavia, and most recently, at the Mexican border with the United States.

The president of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Colleen Kraft, has called the separation of immigrant children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border a form of “sweeping cruelty.” According to a news report, 2,342 children were separated from 2,206 parents at the US-Mexico border between May 5 and June 9 (2018) as part of the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy of prosecuting people who cross the border illegally.⁵⁹ Their separation has been coerced, just as was the separation of the little girl from her family in 2 Kings 5. We can argue, as many have, that these children were/are well-cared for in detention facilities and that the little girl was just a servant for Naaman’s wife and not mistreated.⁶⁰ However, as Dr. Kraft warns: “In fact, highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child’s brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress—known as toxic stress—can carry lifelong consequences for children.”⁶¹ I want to read 2 Kings 5 with “interruption” (Fewell) for the sake of these children at the border.

THE LITTLE GIRL AS TRAUMA SURVIVOR

The gap in 2 Kings 5:2–3 is wide. The context of the gap, however, is war and its violence. We are not told what happened to the little girl's family. Were they killed in the raid that led to her captivity, or sold into slavery elsewhere in Aram? We are not told how old she is. We are not told how long she had been 'serving' Namaan's wife. Was she old enough to bear children? Has she been sexually abused?⁶² What psychological wounds did the little girl struggle with in captivity? What kind of relationship did the little girl really have with her captor and his wife? Judith Herman, a pioneer in trauma studies argues: "Captivity, which brings the victim into prolonged contact with the perpetrator, creates a special type of relationship, one of coercive control."⁶³ As we have seen, many interpreters read the little girl's words in verse 3 positively as her wish for Namaan's healing. But the possibility of trauma experienced by the little girl suggests a different reading. Noting that enslavement methods are "remarkably consistent," whether one is a hostage, a political prisoner, an abused wife, or a prostitute, Herman describes the process that we can imagine the little slave girl went through:

As the victim is isolated, she becomes increasingly dependent on the perpetrator, not only for survival and basic bodily needs but also for information and even for emotional sustenance. The more frightened she is, the more she is tempted to cling to the one relationship that is permitted: the relationship with the perpetrator. In the absence of any other human connection, she will try to find the humanity in her captor. Inevitably, in the absence of any other point of view, the victim will come to see the world through the eyes of the perpetrator.⁶⁴

We could view the little girl's words in verse 3 as the final step in Namaan's psychological control of her. The little girl wishes health for the man who ripped her from her family, killed her people, and keeps her captive in a foreign land.⁶⁵ Perhaps the little girl's wish for Namaan expresses her adaptation to an abusive environment. As Herman notes, "the child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness."⁶⁶ As a captive of war, this is the little girl's situation in Aram. Though Namaan and his wife are not her biological parents, they are now her caretakers/owners. This view challenges those who would argue that "despite the trauma she has endured, this girl is faithful, respectful, and considerate."⁶⁷ One could argue that instead, she is traumatized, desperate, and angling for protection. In this situation, she "must find a way to preserve hope and meaning."⁶⁸ Like abused children, "she will try to be obedient, perhaps to overcome her self-blame" and to earn the protection of her abusers. In effect, she becomes a double self.⁶⁹ We can only wonder what happened to her after Namaan was cured. Herman warns that the survivor of abusive environments "is left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative."⁷⁰

IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL CARE

How might we explain the more idealized interpretations of the little girl's wish in verse 3? Herman

warns that “observers who have never experienced prolonged terror and who have no understanding of coercive methods of control presume that they would show greater courage and resistance than the victim in similar circumstances.”⁷¹ Perhaps these interpretations of the little girl are our wishes for our own steadfastness and faith in the face of adversity. So often we desire to see in biblical characters what we want to see in ourselves. My fear is that the little girl’s tiny shoulders cannot bear the weight of the expectations we have placed upon them, and that our unrealistic demands for resiliency from those like her who struggle with trauma today can make developing resiliency more difficult.

Herman outlines three steps necessary for recovery from trauma: first, establish safety; second, remember and mourn; and third, reconnect with ordinary life.⁷² The little slave girl has no safety in her current situation. We do not know what terrors the little girl faced in Naaman’s household. The text does not say. We do know that war is context for her story, and that Aram is a long-standing enemy of Israel, back to the time of King David (2 Sam 10–12). The text does not share her memories of what happened to her; we have no glimpse of her mourning. We will never know if stage three was possible for the little girl. The text glosses over her trauma. Making the little girl a model of faith does not honor her pain. However, we can use her story as a ‘safe place’ for traumatized readers to work through their trauma in a way that does not re-traumatize them. “‘Storying’ our lives in conversation with biblical texts invites us into a ‘de-centered’ way of being . . . De-centering gives the care receiver an opportunity to step back and identify with a biblical character as well as to view and evaluate that character. This provides distance for seeing, naming, and acknowledging . . .”⁷³ That distance can offer protection from re-traumatizing. Naming aspects of the little girl’s trauma may provide language for those traumatized to begin naming the unspeakable in their own experience of trauma. Part of stage two in trauma recovery involves confronting the horrors and telling the story in detail so that it can be “integrated into the survivor’s life.”⁷⁴ A caveat to this argument is voiced by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger who asks, “Is it possible to talk about trauma without causing pain to those already bearing trauma in their bodies and souls?”⁷⁵ Perhaps not, but avoiding the talk can leave trauma fragments embedded in the mind like “broken glass” that pokes through when triggered in a “mute repetition of suffering.”⁷⁶

Daniel Smith-Christopher reminds us that we cannot “evade the fact that reading about trauma—ancient trauma and the models from modern trauma—has made us all ‘secondary witnesses’ to the suffering of others in both the ancient and modern world.”⁷⁷ What remains for us as engaged readers after stepping into the gap of this text is the necessity of examining our own role as individuals and nations in contributing to or overlooking the trauma of others and then to imagine a different way of being and acting as we work toward a more holistic future for all our children.

NOTES

1 A wonderful model of integration can be seen in the jointly authored work by Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999). She is a pastoral theologian and he a systematic theologian. See also volume 9 (2017) of *Sacred Spaces*, the E-journal of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, co-edited by Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel. The volume contains articles on the intersections between biblical texts and pastoral care, e.g. Jaco Hamman “plays” with the biblical prophet Joel as a “problem child” who can empower his readers to embrace loss, build community, discover a compassionate God, and be a blessing to others; Terry Ann Smith and Raynard Smith explore matriarch Leah’s story in Gen 29 as an example of a persistent mild form of depression called dysthymia that may resonate with single, African-American women; and Ryan LaMothe draws on the “seeds of subversion” embedded in biblical texts to suggest a hermeneutical stance for counselors that can disrupt dominant narratives that contribute to a client’s suffering.

2 Our resistance to fragmentation is bolstered by C. Foster, L. Dahill, L. Golemon, and B. Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), who focused upon the integration of cognitive, practical, and normative apprenticeships in ministry as a model for seminary education.

3 Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel, *Grounded in the Living Word: The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

4 Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel (eds), *Bridging the Divide between Bible and Practical Theology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), xi.

5 See Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Bridging*, for these studies and more.

6 Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 47.

7 Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, 14.

8 Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Road Map* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 18.

9 *Ibid.*, 23–24.

10 *Ibid.*, 35.

11 *Ibid.*, 20.

12 Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, 20–21. Important in this connection is Phyllis Trible’s discussion of prescriptive and descriptive texts in conjunction with her study of Gen 3. See *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 128.

13 As cited in Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, 21. See also Edward Wimberly’s critique in *Using Scripture in Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

- 14 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 117, 401. See also Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, on her relational understanding of the “multiplicity of God,” 67–94.
- 15 Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also O’Connor, *Jeremiah*, who speaks of the partial and provisional images of God offered by Jeremiah to the exiles as ways to help them work through their trauma.
- 16 Else K. Holt, “Daughter Zion: Trauma, Cultural Memory and Gender in Old Testament Poetics,” 162–192. In *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, eds Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Doehorn, Else K. Holt (eds.), *Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica (SANT) 2* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 169.
- 17 Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 39.
- 18 Nancy Ramsay, “Intersectionality: A Model for Addressing the Complexity of Oppression and Privilege,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63,4 (2014): 45–469 at 455.
- 19 Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 35.
- 20 Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984), 19. See also “Response to J. Mays, ‘The Question of Context,’” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann (*Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 159, 1993), 32.
- 21 Brueggemann’s work opened the door to other investigations drawing upon pastoral theology for the study of Psalms. A most recent example comes from Brent Strawn, who introduces Object Relations theory as part of his psalms hermeneutic. He suggests that “life with God in the psalms consists of a struggle over trust, that is, a struggle over proper attachment.” For Strawn, psalm poetry offers what Winnicott terms a “holding environment” or therapeutic frame within which the damaged relationship with God can be reformed. According to Strawn, “honest disclosure [is] a reflex of secure attachment and a primary means to maintain such.” See “Poetic Attachment: Psychology, Psycholinguistics, and the Psalms.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, edited by William P. Brown, 404–423. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 413. Trust also emerges as a key issue for the little slave girl in 2 Kings 5, as we shall see.
- 22 William P. Brown, in *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), notes that “Paul Ricoeur’s observation of the formative dimensions of biblical language pertains especially to the psalms: ‘The [biblical] word *forms our feeling* in the process of expressing it.’” See Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” in his *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 90 (emphasis added).
- 23 Edward Wimberly, *Using Scripture in Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 15.
- 24 David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible’s Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.
- 25 Carr, *Holy Resilience*, 90.

26 Ibid., 192.

27 Nancy R. Bowen, *Ezekiel*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010).

28 Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

29 See Elizabeth Boase and Christopher C. Frechette C. (eds.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016). Michael Koppel and I have used the trauma lens to explore the violent 'revenge fantasies' in communal lament psalms. Mocking and taunting by enemies that fuels revenge fantasies is described frequently in psalm laments (see Pss 22:8; 42:11; 44:17; 55:13; 80:7; 89:51; 102:9; 119:42); see Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel, "Lament Psalms through the Lens of Trauma: Psalms 74, 79, and 137," in *Sacred Spaces* 9 (2017): 7–32. To be mocked is to internalize an individual or collective sense of worthlessness, negative value, and deserved mistreatment.

30 Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, 24.

31 Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1990), 16.

32 Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 37.

33 Mark Verman, "The Torah as Divine Fire," *JBQ* 35,2 (2007): 94–102 and Rabbi Fern Feldman on Exodus Rabah 2:5 <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/the-burning-bush-and-black-fire> "Rabbi Pinchas [said] in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: the Torah that the Holy Blessed One gave, its hide is white fire, its ink is black fire; it is fire mixed with fire, carved from fire, and given from fire: "at His right hand a ritual of fire for them"(Deuteronomy 33).

34 Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 3. Gafney notes that "exercise of the sanctified imagination is also a form of what biblical scholars call reader-response criticism" (4).

35 Ibid., 3.

36 Peter Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Alef Design Group, 1997). See Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, (50–51, 174–175) for two Bibliodramas, one based on Gen 32 and the other on Joshua 2. See also Amy Beth Jones and Stephanie Day Powell, who offer a midrash on 2 Samuel 21:114, in the form of a vigil voiced by Saul's concubine, Rizpah, to surface the displaced grief of mothers who lose their sons to institutional forms of violence, in Dombkowski Hopkins and Koppel, *Bridging the Divide*, 137–144.

37 Timothy Beal, "Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 27–39, at 31. The Psalms present a particularly ripe field for intertextual exploration. As Beth LaNeel Tanner has noted, the Psalms present a *bricolage* or mosaic patchwork "in which other texts are embedded implicitly or explicitly." She argues that psalm superscriptions are a form of canonical intertextuality that give us permission to read other psalms and narratives alongside one another. See Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms through the*

Lens of Intertextuality, St BibLit 26 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 6. This is the approach I used in my recent Psalms commentary [*Psalms: Books 2–3*. Wisdom Commentary Series (Liturgical Press, 2016)], in which I tried to “imagine a superscription wherever possible that would tie the psalm metaphors and speakers to other biblical stories, especially those with female characters, rather than those exclusively tied to David, who is mentioned in the superscription of 73 psalms.”

38 Fewell, *Reading Between Texts*, 33.

39 Eric A. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 54–56.

40 Ibid., 55.

41 An earlier, much abbreviated version of this treatment of 2 Kings 5 appeared in *Lectionary Homiletics: Good Preacher*, July 2013. However, I did not view the text through the lens of trauma study as I am doing here.

42 Tiffany Houck-Loomis, “Traumatic Narratives: When Biblical Narratives of Trauma Re-traumatize,” *Sacred Spaces* (E-journal of the AAPC), vol 9 (2017): 33–65, at 35.

43 Gerald West, “Reading the Bible Differently: Giving Shape to the Discourses of the Dominated.” *Semeia* 73 (1996): 21–44, at 90. See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990.

44 All Bible quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

45 Other translations of her opening words include: ‘would that’, ‘I wish’, ‘o that’. The Hebrew is ‘*achale*’, occurring only twice in Hebrew Bible, here and in Ps 119:5..

46 Esther M. Menn, “Child Characters in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Samuel 16–17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1–19),” 324–352 in *The Child in the Bible*, Marcia J. Bunbe, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 344.

47 Menn, “Child Characters,” 348. Menn opened the door to seeing a hidden transcript (343): “Her marginality as a child captive in enemy territory represents the weakness of the norther kingdom of Israel, which was unable to protect her and no doubt many others like her in time of war.” However, she backed away from the hidden transcript by moving from this comment to a theological point affirming the public transcript (343): “This narrative presents a sustained and ironic contrast between what appears ‘big’ and important and what appears ‘small’ and insignificant that ultimately inverts their usual valuation.”

48 Jean Kyoung Kim, “Reading and Retelling Naaman’s Story (2 Kings 5),” *JSOT* 30.1 (2005): 53. Similarly, Kyung Sook Lee in “Books of Kings: Images of Women without Women’s Reality” (171), argues that the Israelite slave woman “in a certain sense . . . is a missionary of her God and his prophet.” In *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on Books of the Bible and Related Literature* Eerdmans, 2012): 159–177.

49 Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle*. Brown Judaic

Study Series (Brown University, 2013), 161. Parker argues that the little slave girl is too young to pose a sexual threat to Namaan's wife and suggests that "perhaps they share a respectful closeness from their working relationship (v 2b)," 162. The irony Parker points to in the story is meant to maintain Israelite integrity in the face of foreign domination (168); I maintain that this irony furthers the agenda of the Deuteronomistic Historian. The little girl's reality is overlooked in sacrifice to that agenda. Most interpreters are co-opted by that agenda. This is a comforting and comfortable reading of the text, that is, a compliant reading.

50 Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 169.

51 Barbara Lundblad, *Making Time: Preaching Biblical Stories in Present Tense* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 95.

52 Stephen Farris, *Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 14.

53 Farris, *Grace*, 118.

54 Water Brueggemann, "2 Kings 5: Two Evangelists and a Saved Subject," *Missiology: An International Review* 35,3 (July, 2007): 265.

55 Choon-Leong Seow, *Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections: The First and Second Books of Kings*, NIB vol 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 193, 198. Stuart Lasine, in "'Go in Peace' or 'Go to Hell?'" in *Scandinavian Journal of The Old Testament* 25,1 (2011): 3–28 argues for the little girl as a foil of a different kind: she mentions the healing of a prophet in Israel, not God. She helps to set up the contrast between Elijah's zeal for monotheism and Elisha's indifference to syncretism or "tolerant monolatry."

56 Cheryl Strimple and Ovidiu Creanga, "And his skin returned like a skin of a little boy': Masculinity, Disability, and the Healing of Naaman," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, The Bible in the Modern World, 33, ed. Ovidiu Creanga (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 110–126.

57 See Musa Dube's critique in *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 70–78.

58 Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 171 claims that a slave could access power by gaining favor with his or her master, "often resulting in fierce loyalty" like that of the little slave girl, who "is both strategic and savvy" (172). Again, that seems a bit much to put on the shoulders of a little girl. Parker does admit that "while this story may offer uplifting literary reversals of character portrayal, it also raises troubling historical issues about children and slavery" (170), but she doesn't take that far enough.

59 "New statistics: the government is separating 65 children a day from parents at the border." Accessed Sept 8, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/19/17479138/how-many-families-separated-border-immigration>

60 As does Walter Brueggemann, who argues that the 'rules of engagement' even in Israel (Deut 20:14) "permitted such a young woman to be taken home by the enemy in servitude . . . This does not mean she was illtreated, only taken from home and made a servant." See "2 Kings 5: Two Evangelists," 266.

61 Colleen Kraft, MD, MBA, FAAP. "AAP Statement Opposing Separation of Children and Parents at the Border." 5/8/2018. Accessed August 21, 2018. <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/StatementOpposingSeparationofChildrenandParents.aspx>.

62 Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 162 argues that the little slave girl is too young to pose a sexual threat to Namaan's wife and suggests that "perhaps they share a respectful closeness from their working relationship (v 2b)." This is a comforting and comfortable reading of the text.

63 Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 74. Herman counters Brueggemann's observation that being taken home by the enemy in servitude "does not mean she was ill-treated, only taken from home and made a servant" ("2 Kings 5," 266).

64 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 81.

65 Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 171 claims that a slave could access power by gaining favor with his or her master, "often resulting in fierce loyalty" like that of the little slave girl, who "is both strategic and savvy" (172). I wonder is she savvy or traumatized? Parker does admit that "while this story may offer uplifting literary reversals of character portrayal, it also raises troubling historical issues about children and slavery" (170), but I argue that she doesn't take that far enough.

66 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 96.

67 Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 165.

68 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 101.

69 Ibid., 103.

70 Ibid., 110.

71 Ibid., 115.

72 Ibid., 155.

73 Hopkins and Koppel, *Grounded*, 15.

74 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

75 Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care" *Theology Today* 68.1 (April 2011), 8–25; 9.

76 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 2016), 9.

77 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Trauma and the Old Testament: Some Problems and Prospects," in *Trauma and Traumatization*, 241–242.