

**THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE “POWERLESS” WOMEN
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
A. Background of the Study	2
B. Statement of the Problem	3
C. Significance of the Study	6
D. Objectives of the Study	9
E. Scope and Limitation of the Study	10
F. Methodology	11
G. Definition of Terms	11
CHAPTER I: “POWERLESS” WOMEN: ENSURING THE FUTURE OF THE NATION	14
1. Naomi	14
1a. Text: Ruth 3: 1-18	14
1b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	14
2. Ruth	24
2a. Text: Ruth 1: 16-19a, Ruth 4: 13-22	24
2b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	24
3. Shiprah and Puah	28
3a. Text: Exodus 1: 15-21	28
3b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	28
4. Theological Analysis	33
5. Summary and Implications	36
CHAPTER II: “POWERLESS” WOMEN: ACQUIRING POWER TO SAVE ONE’S PEOPLE FROM DESTRUCTION	39
6. Esther	39
6a. Text: Esther 8: 1-17	39
6b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	40
7. Abigail	45
7a. Text: 1 Samuel 25: 2-42	46
7b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	47
8. Dinah	52
8a. Text: Genesis 34: 1-31 5	52
8b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	53
9. Theological Analysis	59
10. Summary and Implications	63

CHAPTER III. “POWERLESS” WOMEN: ACQUIRING A SENSE OF DIGNITY IN THE SOCIETY	65
11. Hannah	65
11a. Text: 1 Samuel 1: 1-2:11, 18-21	65
11b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	67
12. Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah (Daughters of Zelophehad)	71
12a. Text: Numbers 27: 1-11; Numbers 36: 1-13	71
12b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	72
13. Tamar	75
13a. Text: Genesis 38: 1-26	75
13b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	76
14. Theological Analysis	80
15. Summary and Implications	83
 CHAPTER IV. “POWERLESS” WOMEN: SOURCE OF HEALING AND LIVING	90
16. A Young Girl Captive from Israel	90
16a. Text: 2 Kings 5: 1-14	90
16b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	90
17. Widow of Zarephath	95
17a. Text: 1 Kings 17: 8-24	95
17b. Interpretation, discussion, question, preliminary findings	96
18. Theological Analysis	100
19. Summary and Implications	106
 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	110
A. Conclusions	110
B. Recommendations	120
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	125
 CURRICULUM VITAE	130

N.B. The Scriptures being used in this paper is the New Revised Standard Version, otherwise it is indicated.

Abstract

The thesis will focus on the “powerless” women in the Old Testament. They are “powerless” because they are not like the often-mentioned matriarchs, powerful stakeholders who have been held up in most Biblical studies. The likes of these women, some of them unnamed were on the sidelines in the unfolding stories of the Old Testament. This thesis will prove how they have acquired power, used it and become powerful even if they were not in the limelight playing insignificant roles, or as most scholars claim antagonistic roles.

In the introductory part of this thesis there is an attempt to highlight the very purpose of this study, that is, to look into the meaning of the narrative background of the selected stories of women in the Old Testament. The author employs the method of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics by conducting library research, selecting the right materials leading the study into a meaningful reconstruction of the role and image of powerful women in contrast to the dominant understanding of “women as powerless” in the Old Testament and re-connecting them to their proper Biblical context.

The narrative that speaks of an empowered woman whose “powerless” image secures the future of a nation is discussed primarily in chapter one. The story narrates how Naomi and Ruth have proven their loyalty, understanding and faith in the LORD has made them instrumental in securing the future of Jewish nation through the lineage of David. Shiprah and Puah, mentioned only in Exodus show how in their act of defiance of the Pharaoh’s order, courage and God-fearing plans have saved the Hebrew nations in saving the nation’s future, these women have used wisdom, faith and courage in becoming instruments of the LORD in building the Hebrew nation. Their acts of *chesed*

did not only serve their own interests for security and sustenance, but for rebuilding and preserving God's chosen people.

Chapter two will reveal how these "powerless" women acquired power to save their people from destruction. This chapter extracts the themes of filial loyalty, wisdom, and humility from the experiences of Esther, Abigail and Dinah. Their traits were coupled with manifestations of female strength and wisdom, with their wise use of feminine wiles to revert ill advised the decision of King Ahasuerus, the foolish act of Nabal and Jacob's inconsiderate attitude to the plight of Dinah. They were just ordinary women, orphan, housewife and daughter, the common denominators of their action is the need and desires to save the lineage and protect the tribe from destruction.

Chapter three shows how these "powerless" women acquiring a sense of dignity in the society. Hannah, the daughters of Zelophehad and Tamar replicate the themes of how to deal with barrenness, right to inheritance and economic security as a widow (Tamar), in a predominantly patriarchal society, an underlying theme is the imploring of the aid of the Divine Providence especially in connecting righteousness to the *Torah*. The narratives of these women show the demands and norms set by culture should not be compared with the demands of the covenant. What has resulted from the covenant is a result of a vow between the LORD and the people, for them to be preserved, secured and enjoy the fullness of life.

Chapter IV portrays the "powerless" women becoming a source of healing and living. This depicts two cases of unnamed women namely the young captive Israelite servant girl of Naaman and the widow of Zarephath. They both shared the LORD's gift

of healing and provision of food. Located within the Elijah-Elisha Narratives, their stories depict God's love even for the non-Israelites.

These eleven stories of powerless women present the drama of how each of them unselfishly gave their wisdom, life, reputation, sexuality and faith to the LORD for the glory of the LORD's name and in the process, saving and securing the future of their respective families, tribes and nation. These exceptional women of the Old Testament have been seen as epitomes of subverting the status quo, fighting subjugation yet, models of piety, *chesed*, grace and loyalty. All of them have been vessels of the Lord's amazing grace, many of whom sacrificed their own beings in the name of the LORD.