

## A Case of Spousal Abuse? A Study of the Marriage of Jeroboam I (1 Kings 14:1-18)<sup>1</sup>

ROBIN GALLAHER BRANCH (NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY,  
POTCHEFSTROOM)

### *ABSTRACT*

*The biblical text introduces Jeroboam with high praise as a hayil, a man of standing (1 Kgs 11:28). However, something is wrong in his household. Using a cross-disciplinary approach incorporating a close textual reading informed by reader-response criticism, canonical considerations,<sup>2</sup> and psychology, this article focuses on the unnamed, silent wife of Jeroboam and argues that she and her marriage reflect the classic signs of a kind of suffering now termed spousal abuse. Although the vignette recounts no evidence of physical beating, textual evidence supporting the view that the wife of Jeroboam experiences abuse includes the following: her isolation, passivity, and instant obedience. Textual evidence that Jeroboam operates as an abusive husband includes his control over her comings and goings; his command-mode mentality in addressing her; his lack of compassion toward her; his cowardice in sending her to Ahijah instead of going himself; and his earlier violence toward the man of God (1 Kgs 13).*

### A INTRODUCTION

The wife of Jeroboam is introduced in the biblical text within the context of the account of the story of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel in the Divided Kingdom of Israel and Judah.<sup>3</sup> Jeroboam reigned for 22 years, 930-909 B.C.E.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> This article builds on my earlier published work, Robin Gallaher Branch, "The Wife of Jeroboam, 1 Kings 14:1-18: The Incredible, Riveting, History-Changing Significance of an Unnamed, Overlooked, Ignored, Obedient, Obscure Woman" *Old Testament Essays*, 17/2 (2004):157-167.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I:6: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture."

<sup>3</sup> Here is a synopsis of Jeroboam I's reign (1 Kgs 11:26-42, 12-14:20): The story of Jeroboam begins with the prophetic word of the prophet Ahijah that God would tear ten tribes from Solomon and give them to Jeroboam. A reason for the splitting of the kingdom included the people's worship of Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites (11:26-33). In the prophetic word of Ahijah, God graciously promises to establish a dynasty for Jeroboam if Jeroboam keeps God's statutes and commands as David had done. God promises Jeroboam a dynasty as "enduring as the one I built for David" (11:39). But

wife of Jeroboam makes a cameo appearance on the biblical stage within the setting of a family crisis (1 Kgs 14:1-20): Jeroboam's son Abijah (presumably by this woman) is sick to the point of death. The wife of Jeroboam serves as a conduit for information between her husband and the prophet Ahijah and back again. Throughout the interchanges, the wife of Jeroboam remains unnamed and silent.

Her silence and anonymity raise intriguing questions which this article explores. The article takes an interdisciplinary approach, continuing the biblical scholarship of my earlier examination of this passage (1 Kgs 14:1-18) and adding insights from the discipline of psychology.

This article argues that the wife of Jeroboam and her marriage show some of the classic signs of abuse.<sup>5</sup> The marriage of the royals bears what counsellors term "a family likeness to abuse".<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the encounter of Jeroboam and his wife takes place in privacy; the text notes no servants, counsellors, or others in attendance.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, modern studies show that vio-

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once Jeroboam is king, he constructs alternative worship centres twelve miles north of Jerusalem in Bethel and further north at Dan; this is in defiance of the Lord who had mandated Jerusalem as the place of his presence and worship (8:27-30). He then mixed the worship of God with the worshipping Baal. He erected golden calves at both Dan and Bethel and proclaimed that "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (12:28). Jeroboam then built worship shrines upon the high places throughout his kingdom. He put his own priests in to run them and created his own worship festivals (12:31-33). The king's false worship led to a prophetic oracle against him (1 Kings 13) by an unnamed prophet. This unnamed prophet declared that Jeroboam's actions would bring disaster upon his dynasty; Jeroboam ordered the man seized; but Jeroboam's hand shriveled and he countered his own order by asking the man of God to intercede for him. Jeroboam's hand was restored. However, the unnamed prophet's words came true when Baasha assassinated Jeroboam's son and heir, Nadab, and murdered the remaining members of Jeroboam's family (15:27-28) (for an excellent account of Jeroboam I's life and reign, see Paul D. Gardner, ed., *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters: The Complete Who's Who in the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 317-318).

<sup>4</sup> *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 496.

<sup>5</sup> Consider these modern statistics: In the United States, 67 percent of all marriages experience abuse; in South Africa, one in every six women is regularly assaulted by her partner (Aruna Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret* [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993], 9-10).

<sup>6</sup> I credit the use of this phrase, *a family likeness to abuse*, to a suggestion and comment from Jeremy Baker, MD, of Christchurch, New Zealand. Dr. Baker and I presented consecutive papers in a section at the 2008 International Congress of the Society of Biblical Literature, July 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The absence of witnesses, especially non-nuclear family members, is a characteristic of abuse (Richard J. Gelles, "No Place to Go: the Social Dynamics of Marital Vio-

lence against women rises sharply during emergencies.<sup>8</sup> The illness of the child Abijah constitutes both a family and national crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Granted, the verses about the wife of Jeroboam show no evidence of rape or physical beating.<sup>10</sup> But other textual evidence argues for the possibility of her being an abused wife and for the possibility of Jeroboam as her abuser. Consider this: modern research agrees that physical abuse is almost always accompanied by psychological abuse.<sup>11</sup> This paper argues that the verbal interchange of Jeroboam and his wife shows a family likeness, indeed a family pattern, of abuse.

Consequently, if Jeroboam is indeed an abuser, then the judgment of evil (1 Kgs 14:9) against Jeroboam and the later pairing of sins and evil (see 2 Kgs

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lence” [in *Battered Women: A Psychosociological Study of Domestic Violence*, ed., Maria Roy, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1977: 46-63], 46).

<sup>8</sup> James Newton Poling, *Render Unto God: Economic Vulnerability, Family Violence, and Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Abijah must have had an impact on those around him, for at his death he receives this singular honour: “all Israel mourned for him” (1 Kgs 14:13, 18). It was an honour also given to Samuel by the entire people of Israel (1 Sam 25:1). C. H. Spurgeon (“Come Ye Children”: *A Book on the Training of Christian Children*. Warrenton, Missouri: Child Evangelism Fellowship, 1900, 130-131) adds insights both on Abijah and the child’s mother; he calls the mother of Abijah an Egyptian princess and a heathen queen. He notes there was “some good thing” found in the child, yet we readers do not know what that good thing was; it is open to both speculation and imagination. However, by its being mentioned, this good thing, whatever it was, was “a really good, substantial virtue”, Spurgeon (1900:133) writes. Continuing, Spurgeon (1900:133) suggests that the “young Abijah possessed something within him sufficiently real and substantial....The Spirit of God had wrought a sure work upon him, and left within him a priceless jewel of grace.” Spurgeon (1900:135-136), using his imagination but basing it on the chapters about Jeroboam, writes that while the father Jeroboam was prostrated before idols, the Lord found “a true worshipper for Himself in the king’s own child”. There are a few biblical texts about exemplary children; the standard ones are Exodus 2:1-10, the story of the deliverance of the baby Moses by his quick thinking older sister; 1 Samuel 3, the Lord’s visit to the child Samuel; and 2 Kings 5, the story of the Israelite slave girl and her desire to see her master Naaman healed. 1 Kings 14 renders singular praise from the Lord about Abijah and, therefore, presents another child who can be a hero to other children — even in death.

<sup>10</sup> Violence against women in the Bible most typically takes the form of rape (Gen 34:2; Judg 5:3; 19:24-25; 2 Sam 13:14); humiliation by exposure of the genitals (Hos 2:12; Ezek 16:37); the ripping open of pregnant women (Amos 1:13; Hos 14:1); sterility (2 Sam 6:23); and the slaughter of mother and children (Hos 10:14) (see Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997], 71).

<sup>11</sup> Marijke Velzeboer, Mary Ellsberg, C. C. Arcas, & Claudia Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women: The Health Sector Responds* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Health Organization, 2003), 5.

13:2; 13:11; 14:24; 15:9, 18; & 24, for example) in connection with his name as the evaluative standard of the kings of Israel enlarge the definition of evil to include an indictment against wife abuse.<sup>12</sup> Historically as part of the law governing the covenant community, women were to be treated well in Israel. For instance, if a man took a second wife, he was not to deprive the first one of “her food, clothing, and marital rights” (Ex 21:10). Women in Israel were not to be abused.<sup>13</sup>

Evidence that the wife of Jeroboam possibly experienced abuse includes the following:

- Her isolation.
- Her passivity.
- Her instant obedience.
- Her coming back.
- Her lack of response to Jeroboam and Ahijah.
- The possibility that her personality changed throughout her marriage from something that complemented the personality of her husband, a leader of men and man of standing (11:26-28), to something quite colourless.

Evidence that Jeroboam possibly is an abuser includes the following:

- His command-mode manner of addressing his wife.
- His lack of compassion toward her over the illness of their son.
- His control over her comings and goings.
- His insecurity over going to Ahijah himself.
- His lack of courage.
- His violence toward the man of God in 1 Kgs 13.
- His choice of evil.

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<sup>12</sup> Josephus (*The Works of Josephus*. William Whiston, trans. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007, 232) condemns Jeroboam’s activities and remarks that “God was in no long time ready to return Jeroboam’s wicked actions, and the punishment they deserved, upon his own head, and upon the heads of all his house.”

<sup>13</sup> See the excellent article “What God Has Joined” by David Instone-Brewer, *Christianity Today*, October 2007, 26-29. The idea in Ex 21:10 that sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is to be enjoyed, is necessary to a marriage. It should not be denied by one partner to the other. The New Testament affirms this concept (1 Cor 7:3ff) (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976], 156-157). However, it is likewise true that a free woman, whether married or unmarried, remained a minor all her life; she had no legal authority over her life. She was protected by her husband, father, and/or male relatives. For instance, if widowed, a woman often returned to her father’s house or remained under the authority of her father-in-law (see Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 112n).

- His choice deliberately to disobey God regarding the worship of other gods, to erect rival places of worship, to install rival priests, to inaugurate an additional festival, and to offer sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel (11:25-33).
- His use of emotional control over his wife.
- His character change from being a *hayil*, a man of standing (11:28), to doing “more evil than all who lived before” him (14:9).

## **B A CLOSE READING OF JEROBEAM’S WIFE**

I started studying 1 Kings 14 in depth in 1996 because I was reading the books of Samuel and Kings and looking for obscure women.<sup>14</sup> I had chosen for my

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<sup>14</sup> Reader-response criticism involves multiple readings over a long period of time (X. J. Kennedy & Dana Gioia, *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Sixth ed. [New York: HarperCollinsCollege Publishers, 1995], 1812). A reader-response perspective looks at where literary meaning resides — in the text, in the reader, or in an interactive, imaginative, and textually centered space between the text and the reader (Robert DiYanni, *Literature: Approaches to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Second ed. [Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2008], 1575). This article takes a close reading of the biblical text that draws on and is informed by certain aspects of the reader-response literary theory. Wolfgang Iser (1980:51) writes that a literary text must engage a reader’s imagination; when imagination is engaged, the reader begins “the task of working things out for himself”. Using Jane Austen and other writers as models, Iser (1980:51) acknowledges that a text may elicit deeper emotions than what appears on the surface or on first reading. I found the interview between Jeroboam and his wife charged with emotion and not merely a list of commands a king gives his wife.

Iser stresses that the interaction between the text and a reader becomes dynamic. I found 1 Kings 14 to be a dynamic text. One way a text becomes dynamic is that the implications of the text are worked out in the reader’s imagination (Iser 1980:52). The result of this dynamic interaction is that a given situation in a text and its interplay with a reader’s imagination endow the text “with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own” (Iser 1980:52). For me, the questions that 1 Kings 14 raises about the marriage of the royals gave it boundaries and a background, hence my prolonged examination of this vignette, the single interchange recorded in the marriage of the royals. I did not go outside the boundaries of the text. I was guided by the idea throughout biblical narration that actions and words portray character — whether of the deity or of a human being; in other words, a character’s thoughts rarely receive textual record; words and actions, however, do.

Iser (1980:53) writes that sentences in a literary text do not develop in a rigid way. That certainly is true of 1Kings 14. To me, the chapter in full of unexpected twists and turns. I was continually surprised by its scope and characters: king, deity, prophet, unnamed wife, ill son, tragic death, and tragic prophetic words against a household and nation. It is chapter of overwhelming sadness. Iser (1980:53) points to my feelings when he writes that each successive sentence “opens up a particular horizon, which is modified, if not completely changed by succeeding sentences”.

dissertation topic the hardest one I could imagine: Are silent, anonymous women in biblical narration important to God and to the text? Here in 1 Kings 14 I found such a woman — the wife of Jeroboam I — who was mobile, silent, and unnamed. After a series of rapid-fire commands from her husband, she visits the prophet Ahijah and receives three startling prophetic words.

I quickly checked the text and saw that to her was given the first word from the Lord of the upcoming destruction of Israel.<sup>15</sup> Because of the magnitude of this and additional prophetic words given to her, the importance of this unnamed mother, wife, and queen was great. Yet scholars had bypassed her.

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Iser (1980:54) notes that the reader makes a relationship between past, present, and future in aspects of the text and calls these connections “the product of the reader’s mind working in the raw material of the text”. In a close reading of the text such as the one I do for 1 Kings 14, connections between behaviour and speech are made, as are connections between long term associations (as in a marriage) and treatment of one spouse by another. I believe that general modes of treatment, spousal interaction, and habits in a relationship can be seen in this passage.

Iser (1980:54) goes on to say that the connections a reader makes lead to a reader’s feeling of involvement in the text. I clearly engage the text in this article. As a woman, I feel very sorry for the wife of Jeroboam because I believe she is unhappy, not only because of the grave illness of her son but also because the text shows signs of abuse in her marriage.

Iser (1980:54) allows for different interpretations or readings of a text. For example, the possibility I raise of a family likeness to spousal abuse may not be apparent to some readers. Iser (1980:54) says the reason for this may be that another reader is not familiar with or faced with (in the case of this text) domestic violence. In Iser’s (1980:54) words, such a reality is far from the reality of another reader. Again, however, because of the discernible personalities of Jeroboam and his wife, I see a possible family likeness to abuse.

Iser (1980:65) allows for participation with the text. One is certainly drawn into the text in such a way that one has the feeling that there is no distinction between oneself and the events described, Iser (1980:65) writes. Here, however, he goes too far for me. I participated in my imagination as a witness to the events in 1 Kings 14 but not as one of the characters. For me, there was a healthy bit of distance between myself and the royals and the prophet. I never imagined myself as a character in 1 Kings 14, although I did try to see the scene from the point of view of the individual participants.

Iser (1980:68) writes that the production of meaning in a text, a process involving the imagination of the reader, may lead to a discovery that previously had eluded the consciousness. For me, investigating the possibility that the marriage of Jeroboam and his wife bears a family likeness to marriages that entail spousal abuse answered lingering questions about each spouse.

<sup>15</sup> She also received prophetic words about her husband’s disobedience (and how scathingly the Lord viewed it!); the upcoming destruction of the line of Jeroboam; and the death of her son, Abijah.

Over several years as I kept looking at the passage, however, and delivered initial papers on it, I remained troubled. Questions lingered regarding her personality, decisions, and responses.<sup>16</sup> Why did she return home knowing her son Abijah would die as soon as her feet crossed the threshold (1 Kgs 14:17)? Did she not believe the prophetic word? Was she stupid? Did she want her son to die? Why did she not seek to avert the prophetic word by repentance or by running in the opposite direction? Why did she not argue with the prophet and God? Since God had disclosed to Ahijah the couple's deception, why did she not summon the king?

Her behaviour to me was mystifying—as mystifying as the behaviour of modern women who are verbally and physically abused by their partners or husbands and who go back to them. The wife of Jeroboam returns — so quickly, so obediently, so like an arrow in flight. I reluctantly faced the possibility that this woman, mother, and wife shows many of the tendencies of what a modern reader would recognise as an abused spouse. Because of this, I was giving the text a close reading, interacting with it, and using aspects of a literary theory called reader-response.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The process, for me, was lively and engaging. I was that “fly on the wall” in the palace at Tirzah; I listened to Jeroboam order his wife to go disguised to the prophet; I heard no words of tenderness or comfort from him; I watched her collapse as she heard Ahijah's harsh words.

<sup>17</sup> Reader-response criticism started flowering in the United States in the 1970s, but it is really quite old. The Greeks viewed literature as rhetoric, a means of making an audience, a reader, react in a certain way (see Ross Murfin & Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* [Boston: Bedford Books, 1997], 322).

In explaining one aspect of reader-response, Wolfgang Iser (1978:168) calls the silences in a text gaps. He (1978:168) writes that what is missing in apparently trivial scenes — the gaps — “is what stimulate the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He (a reader) is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant for what is not said.”

For 1 Kings 14, a vignette showcasing a crisis in the royal household, a gap is lengthy information over decades on the king's family. The narrator is silent, refusing to supply such a family scrapbook. Yet a cornerstone of biblical narration is that the stories chosen for a book fit into the overall themes of the book. A theme in the Jeroboam Cycle, the chapters about the first king of the Northern Kingdom, is that Jeroboam has done more evil than all who proceeded him (Bill T. Arnold & Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999:228); this vignette certainly backs up this theme.

Consequently, because of the brevity of biblical narrative, an element of trust must exist between a reader of the biblical text and the text itself. I as a reader of the biblical text must trust the author of 1 Kings in this way: the vignette in 1 Kings 14 about the marriage of the royals presents a representative window into their lives and their marriage. I trust that this slice or window is accurate, truthful, and honourable; it hon-

There are various forms of reader-response criticism. One form sees the text as a mirror in which a reader sees himself/herself; I do not follow this model. Another model argues that to make sense of a literary work, a reader must find in it or create through the process of reading a literary theme; I do not follow this model either.<sup>18</sup> A model of reader-response I like is that proposed by Wolfgang Iser who argues that one must focus on the text rather than on the feelings and reactions of a reader.<sup>19</sup> Iser (1978:148-149) suggests that a reader makes sense of a text over time (as I did in the case of 1 Kings 14), moves through it sentence by sentence (or verse by verse as I did), and fills in gaps and make inferences about what is being implied by textual details (as I did).<sup>20</sup>

I found that as I studied the 1 Kings 14 text that I was engaged in a process — a sure sign of a reader-response perspective. For reader-response critics, a text is not stationary; it does not stand still; quite the contrary, it lives in the imagination of its readers. A reader-response perspective attempts to describe what is happening in a reader's mind when interacting with a text.<sup>21</sup> For example, Iser (1978:9) believes the meaning of a text “can only be grasped as an image”.

A reader-response perspective recognises the possibility that a plurality of interpretations are possible for a literary work.<sup>22</sup> I acknowledge that a text can share different insights with different generations. Literary works (like the Bible) can “say different things to readers of different historical eras because of

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ourably presents the couple's situation, habits, and personalities. Consequently, it invites the reader — within the boundaries set by the text — to imagine the scene and evaluate what is taking place. For example, Jeroboam's command-mode style of addressing his wife seems habitual; the “gap,” to use Iser's phrase, of other recorded incidents of his other monologues in dealing with her are supplied by a reader and are possible projections (again, to use another of Iser's words) or scenarios because of the way the writer of 1 Kings 14 presents the vignette. This vignette is representative of their relationship.

<sup>18</sup> David Bleich advocates the mirror model, a model in which the readers see themselves; Louise Rosenblatt argues against putting too much emphasis on a reader's imagination, identity, or feelings about literary interpretation; and Norman Holland stresses that every reader creates a specific identity theme unique to himself or herself in reading a work (see DiYanni, *Literature* 1576).

<sup>19</sup> See DiYanni, *Literature*, 1576 for a summary of these three models.

<sup>20</sup> DiYanni, *Literature*, 1576.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy & Gioia, *Literature*, 1811. Iser (1978:139-140) points out the multiple references invoked by textual signals, their interconnectedness, and the image they build in one's mind. Consequently, a text is not static, stationary, brittle, or set-in-stone forever, for Iser. One intended image is surprise; the reader brings, or fills in, as Iser (1978:143) says, a reaction of surprise to the text. I found that my study of 1 Kings 14 produced surprise in my mind as I looked at the questions and issues the chapter presented.

<sup>22</sup> See Kennedy & Gioia, *Literature*, 1812.



their particular needs, concerns, and historical circumstances”.<sup>23</sup> In a patriarchal culture, for example, it is quite likely that the Bible’s disapproval of Jeroboam’s actions toward his wife may not have been noticed. Likewise, the Bible’s reporting of the gang rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine seems to be written without much overt censure — unless one looks at the woman’s hands: in death they point toward the closed, barred door and the Levite’s safety (Judges 19:27).

Literary critic Terry Eagleton (1991:74) notes a hermeneutical development that originated in Germany called reception theory; it is linked to reader-response because it “too examines the reader’s role in literature”. In his reader reception theory, the text gives “cues” to the reader, “invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning”.<sup>24</sup> To me, the most important cues that the wife of Jeroboam lived daily in a terror-filled world of abuse are her silence, her instant obedience, her seeming minimalisation of herself, and her return home.

My reading of the text was not linear.<sup>25</sup> It involved looking at my beliefs, viewing the text from a canonical perspective, interacting with the writings of other scholars, and interviewing those with expertise in psychology. I had to become intimately familiar with narrational clues or cues, the so-called social codes the text assumes I knew.<sup>26</sup> I had to be prepared for surprises that the text might present; to shed my presuppositions; I had to allow my beliefs to be changed and even transformed.<sup>27</sup> And they were.<sup>28</sup>

In reader-response criticism, the role of a reader is participatory and active.<sup>29</sup> The text often does not specify that something or someone or an object has certain properties — but readers fill them in.<sup>30</sup> For me in reading and re-reading 1 Kings 14, I read the text from the angles of those it mentions — king, wife, God, prophet, and child.

<sup>23</sup> DiYanni, *Literature*, 1577.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 76.

<sup>25</sup> See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 77.

<sup>26</sup> See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> See Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> To me, the 1 Kings passage contains significant omissions — what Iser calls blanks or gaps — that “powerfully affect the reader, who must explain them, connect what they separate, and create in his or her mind aspects of a work that aren’t *in* the text but what the text incites” (italics included) (see Murfin & Ray, *The Bedford Glossary*, 324).

<sup>29</sup> See Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 515.

<sup>30</sup> See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theology and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 516-517.

However, I stop short of being entirely sold on the reader-response perspective: I do not believe I as a reader create meaning.<sup>31</sup> Instead I, as a biblical scholar, try to discover it. Hence, that is why I offer this view that possibly the sad vignette of the encounter of Jeroboam I and his wife in 1 Kings 14 shows a sad family likeness to an abusive interaction that is, in this family unit at least, normal, tolerated, and expected.<sup>32</sup>

### C JEROBOAM: A CASE FOR AN ABUSING HUSBAND

Jeroboam, chosen by God to be king of Israel, recipient of a covenant covering his house for generation after generation if he obeyed God, is a man who becomes a byword and definition for evil (1 Kgs 11:26-40; 2 Kgs 3:3). Significantly, there is no evidence of intergenerational abuse in Jeroboam's life.<sup>33</sup> But in one of the most startling downward spirals in the biblical text, Jeroboam falls from being described as a *hayil*, a man of standing (1 Kgs 11:28), to becoming within his lifetime the standard for evil and sin (14:9).<sup>34</sup> The biblical text amply supports this. Jeroboam quite possibly also fits the pattern (for lack of a better word) of an abuser. Abuse is a modern word for an age-old condition of emotional, verbal, and/or physical violence.

Margi Laird McCue provides a number of insights on an abusive male.<sup>35</sup> Traits of an abuser include low self-esteem; a belief in male superiority; the tendency to blame others for his actions; a pathological jealousy; a dual personality; severe stress reactions; the frequent use of sex as an act of aggression; and a refusal to believe that his actions may have negative consequences. An abusive man is possessive of his wife's time; he tends to be jealous. He stalks her, eavesdrops, puts her under surveillance, and monitors her activities. The abuser typically blames the woman because he feels a loss of control.

Men who batter their partners exhibit controlling behaviour patterns.<sup>36</sup> Men who assault their partners conform to rigid gender roles, accept the dominance of the male as a right, and see violence as an acceptable way to resolve a conflict.<sup>37</sup> A violent man knows from experience how to frighten others and

<sup>31</sup> See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 236.

<sup>32</sup> As such it presents a view of marriage that is unbiblical, unhealthy, abnormal, and not holy.

<sup>33</sup> See Poling, *Render Unto God*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Hayil* is a title of honour for both men and women in the biblical text. The description is shared by Boaz (Ruth 2:1), Ruth (Ruth 3:11), Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:1), and the Proverbs 31 woman (Prov. 31:10).

<sup>35</sup> Margi Laird McCue, *Domestic Violence: A Reference Book* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1995), 108-109.

<sup>36</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 5.

play on their fears.<sup>38</sup> A man with a low level of self-control over his actions and one evidencing strong anti-social behaviour (the technical term is psychopathy) tends not to care very much about the suffering he causes others.<sup>39</sup> Abuse takes place within complex situational conditions; in these conditions, abusers use the children of their partners or ex-partners as a means to play on fear and to continue the abuse.<sup>40</sup> The child Abijah and his grave illness spark the encounter between Jeroboam and his wife.

The biblical text substantiates that Jeroboam fits a number of the characteristics of an abuser. Jeroboam certainly controls the encounter with his wife: he summons her and commands her. He orders her to go disguised to the prophet, a command essentially telling her to lie (1 Kgs 14:2). His commands serve to monitor and direct her activities. His reaction to the man of God's decree against him (1 Kgs 13) was violence ("Seize him!" v. 4).<sup>41</sup> The encounter with the man of God shows Jeroboam's anger and severe stress over his withered hand; he commands the man of God to intercede immediately so that his hand could be restored (v. 5). Jeroboam refuses to believe his actions of setting up golden calves in Dan and Bethel, erecting shrines on high places, establishing new feast days, and even assuming the role of priest and offering sacrifices would have a severe consequences (1 Kgs 12:25-33). Throughout his reign, he expresses no repentance or remorse although given several opportunities.<sup>42</sup>

Apparently in terms of his encounter with his wife, he sends her on a potentially dangerous errand totally alone and without protection.<sup>43</sup> The text shows that Jeroboam has learned that aggressive behaviour controls others.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> James Newton Poling, *Understanding Male Violence: Pastoral Care Issue* (Danvers: Chalice Press, 2003), 25.

<sup>39</sup> Eli J. Finkel, "Impelling and Inhibiting Forces in the Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence" (*Review of General Psychology*, June 2007 11(2): 193-207)..

<sup>40</sup> Marisa L. Beeble, Deborah Bybee, & Cris M. Sullivan, "Abusive Men's Use of Children to Control their Partners and Ex-Partners (*European Psychologist* 2007 12(1): 54-61).

<sup>41</sup> When a man learns he can control others by force of violence, he will use that method (Mildred Daley Pagelow, *Woman Battering: Victims and Their Experiences* [Beverly Hills: Sage Library of Social Research, 1981], 43).

<sup>42</sup> Opportunities for repentance include his encounter with the man of God (1 Kings 13) and hearing the prophetic word from Ahijah that was delivered by his wife upon her return (14:17). One would think that the death of his son would have humbled him and brought him to repentance as it did David (2 Sam 12:15-25), but it did not. One would think that the judgment against his house and Israel would have brought him to repentance as it did Ahab years later (2 Kgs 21:25-28), but it did not.

<sup>43</sup> A woman traveling alone has no protection. She could be mistaken for a prostitute or a runaway slave. She could be easily assaulted and killed.

<sup>44</sup> Pagelow, *Woman Battering*, 129.

An abuser denies personal responsibility.<sup>45</sup> Jeroboam, by choosing not to go to Ahijah himself, abrogates responsibility, forces his wife to lie, and shows himself a coward. Arguably, Jeroboam uses a mother's natural concern for her child and her fear of his death to compel his wife to obey, to lie, and to embark on an errand of deceit.

A person like Jeroboam with marked leadership characteristics may be an abuser. According to James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, men who batter their wives are often articulate, function successfully in their jobs and are competent in their roles outside of marriage. They come from all walks of life, and many hold positions of leadership.<sup>46</sup> An abuser typically allocates all responsibility for the success of a marriage and the health of the children to the woman. An abuser knows how to push his wife's buttons of guilt and worry.<sup>47</sup> Jeroboam's speech seems to play on his wife's concern over their child's life and any guilt she may have over her abilities as a mother. Of course she will go to Ahijah!

An abuser is typically both bully and coward. Jeroboam's actions indicate he wants to control all situations.<sup>48</sup> It also would seem that Jeroboam's actions also indicate he feels insecure about his throne; that is why he erected golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12:26-30). Jeroboam's action shows no faith in the God who gave him the kingdom. Hungering to keep his position whatever the cost shows a desire to have and to wield power as king.<sup>49</sup> Jeroboam is jealous of Jerusalem's position as the centre of Israel's festivals;

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, one study found that more highly educated batterers inflicted more serious injuries (James Alsdurf & Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989], 67, citing Jeffrey A. Fagen, Douglas K. Steward and Karen V. Hanse, "Violent Men or Violent Husbands?" Finkelhor et al., eds., *Dark side of Families* [Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1983], 57).

<sup>47</sup> Rita-Lou Clarke, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 43.

<sup>48</sup> In an abusive, dysfunctional marriage like that of Jeroboam and his wife, the first step toward healing is to recognise abuse as sin. Jeroboam does not do this. Another step is for a husband with a propensity toward control to direct his ability to control toward having power over his own impulses. A husband needs to take responsibility for his actions and experience the natural consequences of his behaviour (James Alsdurf & Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 42-43). Jeroboam's cowardly action of sending his wife in his place to Ahijah shows his perpetual avoidance of taking responsibility for his actions.

<sup>49</sup> See Tom L. Eisenman, *Temptations Men Face: Straightforward Talk on Power, Money, Affairs, Perfection, Insensitivity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 115-116.

hence his building of shrines, installing priests, offering sacrifices<sup>50</sup> and instituting rival festivals (1 Kgs 12:31-33). Possibly the trait of jealousy extends towards his wife; researchers note that jealousy is consistently an abuser's hallmark.<sup>51</sup>

The biblical text emphasises Jeroboam's opportunities for repentance (13:1-10; 14:1-18) — and his lack of repentance. Because Jeroboam shows no remorse, maybe he is psychopathic. Psychopathic men do not suffer pangs of conscience; most normally-socialised men who are not psychopathic do go through some remorse for abusing their wife.<sup>52</sup> Jeroboam displays no remorse about any of his actions as king — or husband. Instead he intensifies his disobedient actions with innovative religious reforms the biblical text subsequently describes as evil.

Because Jeroboam seems to act in an emotionally detached way, he may have a severe personality disorder called ESS (Extremely Self-Serving). According to Gary Hankins and Carol Hankins,<sup>53</sup> a husband with this disorder is so self-centred that he believes he has every right to do whatever he wants to his wife. An ESS husband regards his wife as his personal property.

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<sup>50</sup> 2 Chronicles adds more insights on the character of Jeroboam and his sins. Evidently after the events in 1 Kings 14 took place, war broke out between Jeroboam and Rehoboam's son and successor as king of Judah, Abijah (2 Chr 13). Abijah, outnumbered two to one, taunted Jeroboam before the battle at Mount Zemaraim in the hill country of Ephraim. According to Abijah, Jeroboam brought the golden calves he had made with him; Abijah said that Jeroboam made anyone who consecrated a young bull and seven rams a priest "of what are not gods" (2 Chr 13:8-9). In contrast, Abijah kept the Aaronic priesthood and reminded Jeroboam he alone was of the chosen line of David. In this decisive battle between Judah and Israel, the forces of Jeroboam numbered 800,000 and the forces of Abijah tallied only 400,000. Jeroboam's forces surrounded those of Judah. Judah cried out to the Lord and the "Israelites fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hands" (2 Chr 13:16). Judah decisively won. Judah inflicted 500,000 casualties on Israel because "God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah" (2 Chr 13:15). Significantly, "Jeroboam did not regain power during the time of Abijah. And the Lord struck him down and he died" (2 Chr 13:20).

<sup>51</sup> Abusive men are frequently irrationally jealous about their wives and the activities of their wives. Consequently, they monitor their wives' use of space and time and question all contact with other men (Donald G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships* [New York: Guilford Press, 1998], 44).

<sup>52</sup> Dutton, *The Abusive Personality*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Gary Hankins with Carol Hankins, *Prescription for Anger: Coping with Angry Feelings and Angry People* (New York: Warner Books, 1993), 15.

Instead of kindness or concern, two qualities expected as normal when a couple faces the illness of their son, Jeroboam commands his wife.<sup>54</sup> He rapidly fires off five orders: “Go. Disguise yourself. Go to Shiloh. Take ten loaves of bread. Go (to the prophet)” (14:2-3). Issuing imperatives seems to be his normal method of operation with her. Jeroboam’s mode of communication permits no response. He treats his wife as if she deserves to be ordered around. His treatment of her seems to show he views her as one who must meet his needs, as one who lives to meet his needs. His words and actions indicate he keeps her in her place, and her place is subservient to him. But she is not his slave; she is his wife. Treating her as a slave is abuse.<sup>55</sup> Abusive men have learned that abuse tends to keep women in their place.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Research shows that the more frequently the woman is verbally abused, the less capable she is of seeing her relationship as positive (Barbara Wexler, *Violent Relationships: Battering and Abuse Among Adults* [Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003], 48).

<sup>55</sup> Carole R. Fontaine (2008:1116) in her excellent study of human rights issues in the Bible and the ancient world writes that modern day people “do not have access to the testimonies of ancient survivors of torture and captivity, slavery and sexual abuse. The ancient world preferred them out of sight and out of mind.” The norm in the ancient world was that might made right. The winner-takes-all mentality meant that a victorious army made the losing army’s survivors (and their families and country) slaves. One can hear that attitude in the taunt of Goliath (1 Sam 17:8-11). Fontaine (2008:77) views the Bible as heavily patriarchal. She writes that no patriarch could stomach a topsy-turvy world in which his possessions violate his wishes. In the context of this article about the possibility of “a family likeness to abuse” in the marriage of Jeroboam and his wife, the obedience of the wife was expected and indeed happens. Furthermore, a tradition in Israel and Judah since Saul seems to be that the authority of the king stretches to his kingdom’s remotest corner and controls issues of life and death. For examples of a king’s authority, see Saul’s encounter with the medium of Endor (1 Sam 28); David’s encounter with the wise woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14); and David’s decision to hand over Saul’s descendants to the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21).

I, however, do not think that the Bible as a whole substantiates the unquestioned authority in all circumstances of a king, husband, or man, nor does it expect a mindless, instant obedience of a woman, subject, wife, slave, or child. To me, the Bible calls for care of the weaker members of society — the widow, orphan, alien, and poor (Deut 14:29) — by those stronger in society, usually the man and the warrior. Care of these weaker groups was to characterise Israel as a covenant people and to differentiate her from her neighbours. As a people, Israel was to mirror her covenant God in holiness in worship and in holy actions. “Be holy,” God says repeatedly. Why? “Because I, the Lord your God, am holy,” is the answer (Lev 19:2).

<sup>56</sup> Dutton, *The Abusive Personality*, 45.

## D THE MARRIAGE OF THE ROYALS

Society may look on Jeroboam and his wife as married, but their marriage came to an end long ago.<sup>57</sup> This small vignette in 1 Kings 14 recording their encounter abounds with evidence that their marriage is over. Neither Jeroboam nor his wife shows evidence of marital satisfaction.<sup>58</sup> The encounter indicates an abruptness, almost a master/slave manner of relating to each other, and a lack of tenderness. There is no personal relationship between them.<sup>59</sup> Jeroboam treats his wife curtly. Jeroboam takes no responsibility in the marriage. In the command mode, he portrays no tenderness, no respect, and clearly no love toward her. The wife of Jeroboam exudes lifelessness. Her passivity makes her seem emotionally dead inside. Unlike other women in Kings with both good and bad textual assessments — the widow of Zarephath; Jezebel; and Athaliah, and Jehosheba<sup>60</sup> — the wife of Jeroboam portrays no self-confidence. Why is the wife of Jeroboam — by her namelessness, silence, and obedience — so weak, so colourless?

Consider the following possibilities about the marriage of the royals: firstly, the wife of Jeroboam is economically dependent on Jeroboam; secondly, Jeroboam's wife is emotionally dependent on him. These two dependencies, according to modern research, contribute to the risk of domestic partner abuse.<sup>61</sup> Of the two dependencies — emotional and economic — research indicates that a woman's economic dependency plays a significant role in terms of risk of abuse, while emotional dependency plays a modest role.<sup>62</sup> There is no indication that the wife of Jeroboam is independently wealthy.

In any marriage, the partners assume roles that if not comfortable are at least habitual. In this vignette showcasing the interaction of an intimate scene between Jeroboam and his wife, Jeroboam clearly acts as the decider, the one who orders others around, the commander. Often a woman living in an abusive, dysfunctional situation becomes an enabler. She functions as the heroic martyr,

<sup>57</sup> See Charles Allen, *When a Marriage Ends* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 15.

<sup>58</sup> Studies indicate that marital satisfaction decreases with verbal aggression (see Susan C. South, Eric Turkheimer, Thomas F. Oltmanns, "Personality Disorder Symptoms and Marital Functioning" *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, October 2008 76(5): 769-780).

<sup>59</sup> Allen, *When a Marriage Ends*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> See 1 Kgs 17, 19 and 2 Kgs 11.

<sup>61</sup> Robert F. Bornstein, "The Complex Relationship Between Dependency and Domestic Violence: Converging Psychological Factors and Social Forces." *American Psychologist*, September 2006 61(6): 595-606

<sup>62</sup> Bornstein, "The Complex relationship", 600.

concealer, comforter, placater, rescuer, persecutor, and/or victim.<sup>63</sup> The wife of Jeroboam certainly is a co-concealer of the truth and a resigned enabler of her husband's orders and whims.<sup>64</sup>

Jeroboam's command mode shows that the model of marriage in his household is male dominance. The structure of their marriage, the text reveals, is male headship/female submission. This model, if taken to an extreme, is a dangerous structure and may set a tone for domestic violence.<sup>65</sup> Power dispersed in a hurtful ways has the potential to destroy. The wife of Jeroboam in her extreme passivity throughout the passage displays evidence of responding to abusive power by retreating into a silent shell. Perhaps a silent shell is her safe haven.

Taken to an extreme, a male headship/female submission model destroys a woman's esteem and turns a man into a monster.<sup>66</sup> Patriarchy makes a woman live without power in a condition of graded subjugation.<sup>67</sup> Neither partner fulfils his/her God-given potential. At its utmost, both partners in a male headship/female submission model suffer. Their marriage dynamic is off balance. Taken to an extreme, this model puts the burden of a marriage's success on the woman. She carries the weight for the emotional, physical, psychological, parenting, sexual, spiritual, economic, maintenance, and provision issues in a marriage. Furthermore, she believes the truthfulness of the words of her husband and the justification of his actions toward her.<sup>68</sup> However, she believes lies.

An abused woman's belief in her husband's words and her acceptance of his actions toward her as right destroy her self-esteem and warp her personality. The inner workings of a marriage like this are not normal; they are dysfunctional. But because of habit and use, they become normal and even self-perpetuating. Others observe the dysfunction. Young children in the marriage see

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth, & Paul Meier, *Love is a Choice: Recovery for Codependent Relationships* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 159-162.

<sup>64</sup> The wife of Jeroboam also portrays aspects of a victim. Consider more insights from Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier, *Love is a Choice*, 162): A true victim did not ask for this situation, whatever it is. One kind of victim thinks she could be happy if only all this were not happening. This woman may think she is the soul most to be pitied because she is so very nice down inside and none of this was deserved. Another kind of victim who is the enabler is a self-pitying person, but a true victim does not perceive of herself in this self-pitying way. However, the silence of the wife of Jeroboam makes it impossible to know if she is self-pitying or merely resigned to her life.

<sup>65</sup> See A. L. Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 28-29.

<sup>66</sup> Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Aruna Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret*, 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret*, 30.



something that is inherently evil and abnormal as normal. In short, abuse prevents a healthy partnership.<sup>69</sup> In this vignette in 1 Kings 14, the marriage of the royals — Jeroboam and his wife — shows no signs of health.<sup>70</sup>

Let us briefly look at Israel's law regarding marriage and divorce of a Hebrew man and a Hebrew slave woman. Within this context minimum standards were given. In Exodus 21:10-11 the following is proclaimed: "If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money." Commenting on this text, David Instone-Brewer writes that these three categories are marriage vows, "promises of faithfulness and provision of food, clothing, and love. The latter three may be generalized as material and emotional support. Physical and emotional abuse are extreme failures of material and emotional support."<sup>71</sup> At the very least, Jeroboam's manner toward his wife shows an extreme failure of emotional support.

## E THE QUESTION OF VIOLENCE

The terse, strained interaction between Jeroboam and his wife brings up the possibility of violence in their marriage. Research stresses that a wife's actions are not the cause or precipitator of violence.<sup>72</sup> Quite the contrary. Violence is a specific choice made by an abusive husband.<sup>73</sup> A man's violence is a man's choice of behaviour.<sup>74</sup> Violence is learned behaviour.<sup>75</sup> At the heart of violent actions is the condition of the heart. Until this heart condition is changed and sin is acknowledged, violence will continue.<sup>76</sup> However, let me state again that the possibility of physical violence in their marriage is just that, a possibility; the biblical text presents what I see as a sad family likeness of abuse but no evidence of Jeroboam's physical violence against his wife.

<sup>69</sup> Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> See also Robin Gallaher Branch, "Spreuke 31:10-31: 'n Bybelse model vir die huwelik," *Die Kerkblad* 106 (2003):20-22 and my paper at the Society of Biblical International meeting, July 2008, in Auckland, New Zealand, "Proverbs 31:10-31 as a model for marriage" gives biblical guidelines for a healthy, happy, and successful marriage. Incidentally, the marriage described in Prov. 31:10-31 is egalitarian.

<sup>71</sup> David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 308.

<sup>72</sup> Margie Margi Laird McCue cautions against looking for the causes of male violence in women; that may be another way of blaming the victim (McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 84).

<sup>73</sup> Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 68.

<sup>74</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 84.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>76</sup> Violence is a sign of the batterer's choice to allow such corruption to take root and become evil (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 57, 59).

The question of power in a relationship appears to play a significant role in battering; some studies show it begins before marriage.<sup>77</sup> There are attempts to dominate one's partner via financial, social, and decision-making control. Some researchers theorise that because men of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to batter, they do it to assert the power that they lack economically. Violence becomes the tactic that compensates for the control, power, independence, and self-sufficiency these men lack in other areas.<sup>78</sup> Presumably, however, Jeroboam as king of Israel enjoys financial security.

Popular culture says violence is a response to stress, the result of poor family modelling, and the outcome of failure to be aware of one's feelings. However, this is not an accurate discernment of where the battle lies. James Alsdurf & Phyllis Alsdurf argue that battering and violence are expressions of evil and must be confronted on a spiritual level because they are spiritual problems.<sup>79</sup> The text verifies that Jeroboam had many spiritual problems. The prophetic word charges Jeroboam with making for himself other gods, idols of metal. Instead of seeking the God of Israel, Jeroboam provoked the God of Israel to anger (1 Kgs 14:9).

Violence by the batterer is violence on the batterer's own behalf. It is violence designed to serve himself and attain power over others. It is violence based on a lust for power, a lust which destroys.<sup>80</sup> Jeroboam's violent behaviour toward the man of God (1 Kgs 13) and his treatment of his wife (1 Kgs 14) show he gears his actions to attain power over others.

Abuse denotes elements of control and a fight for hierarchy. Abuse also deals with terror, power, ownership, and entitlement.<sup>81</sup> The problem of wife abuse is not one of feminism, secular humanism, or a lack of headship in the home. It is the problem of evil — unseen and unopposed.<sup>82</sup>

Studies show that changing the actions of the woman cannot change the abuse a woman receives.<sup>83</sup> Abuse has little to do with what a woman does or

<sup>77</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 33.

<sup>78</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 33-34.

<sup>79</sup> Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 53-62.

<sup>80</sup> Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 56.

<sup>81</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 95

<sup>82</sup> See Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 62. Studies show that violence against women crosses all racial and economic lines; for example, in a given time there were as many calls from Montgomery County, Maryland, about domestic disturbances as there were from downtown Washington, DC. Some studies, however, show that there is more domestic violence among the poor and working class (McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 85).

<sup>83</sup> Flavius Josephus (*The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whitson [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007], 233) elaborates on the biblical account by saying the wife of Jeroboam returned home because "she was forced to make such haste, on account

does not do, what a woman says or does not say. Sadly, a woman's efforts to change her behaviour cannot alone save her marriage or her family. A popular myth — and one erroneous to its core — is that a woman saves her marriage and changes her husband by changing her behaviour and words. The abuser himself is responsible for his actions and for changing his behaviour.<sup>84</sup> Jeroboam, though undoubtedly warned by his wife on her return of Ahijah's prophecy,<sup>85</sup> chooses not to change. He disregards the prophetic word at the cost of destroying his household, abolishing his dynasty, and destroying his nation.

## F WHY SHE GOES BACK/WHY SHE STAYS

Why does Jeroboam's wife go back after hearing Ahijah's prophecy? Why does she stay as an abused wife, if indeed she is an abused wife?<sup>86</sup>

The return of the wife of Jeroboam sets in motion the chain of events outlined in Ahijah's prophetic word leading to the death of her son, the extinction of the house of Jeroboam, and the uprooting of Israel (1 Kgs 14:6-16). Modern research finds that an abused woman who returns home after a battering session (or is already an abused woman) most often has been married for a long time; she is not a newlywed.<sup>87</sup> Estimating the length of their marriage from their son Abijah's age, the royals realistically had been married at least a decade when this incident takes place. Sadly, one pattern of family violence is that women in a violent situation want someone to tell them what to do.<sup>88</sup> Why is this? The answer is that women in abusive situations feel disoriented and live with a very low self-esteem.<sup>89</sup> Jeroboam and Ahijah both comply and clearly tell the wife of Jeroboam what to do.

The primary reason an abused woman stays in an abusive relationship is fear.<sup>90</sup> This fear involves fear of a husband and fear of the future. A woman's fear includes fear of the unknown and fear of doing or saying something to arouse her husband's anger and to trigger his abuse.<sup>91</sup> Perversely, an abused

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of her husband." He adds that she was "in a miserable condition" and "greatly grieved". See also See Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 67.

<sup>84</sup> Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 69.

<sup>85</sup> Josephus (*The Works of Josephus*, 233) elaborates on the biblical text by adding that the wife "related all the circumstances to the king".

<sup>86</sup> In the 1920s it was believed women of low intelligence stayed in an abusive relationship; in the 1930s to the 1940s, it was believed battered women were masochistic; from the 1970s on, it has been believed that battered women are isolated and have fewer educational and social resources as backups (McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 112-116).

<sup>87</sup> See McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 112-116.

<sup>88</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 80.

<sup>89</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 80.

<sup>90</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 113-114.

<sup>91</sup> Clarke, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women*, 15.

woman may fear abandonment more than an outburst of abuse, for at least abuse is known and somewhat structured but the future is wide open. The biblical text gives an ancient, interesting parallel: the liberated Hebrews begged Moses to let them return to Egypt rather than to lead them to face the wilderness (Ex 14:11; Num 14:2-4). Human nature presents this tendency: known death is sometimes better than unknown obstacles and opportunities. Perhaps the wife of Jeroboam, and mother of Abijah, returns home because her fear of the unknown is greater than her fear of Jeroboam.

The long-term effect of the repeated and unpredictable situations of terror to which battered women are subjected is that they become afraid of staying in their marriages and yet are more terrified of leaving.<sup>92</sup> In the case of the wife of Jeroboam, where could she go? Who would take her in? The arm of the king extended throughout the kingdom. Quite likely she does not know what to do because she does not know if her actions will bring her what she possibly longs for the most: safety.<sup>93</sup>

Fear involves extensive loss. An abused woman fears the loss of her family, the loss of her reputation and status, the loss of her children, the loss of her home, the loss of income; an abused woman faces the cultural pressure and economic necessity of staying put.<sup>94</sup> Surprisingly, current research has found that women of higher socioeconomic status tend to turn inward when encountering spousal aggression.<sup>95</sup> Arguably, the silence of the wife of Jeroboam is not because she is stupid but because she has turned inward. She possibly seeks safety from a frightening exterior world by turning inside to a quiet place where at least she can control the silence.

Interviews with abused women show they retain a naïve hope. Research found that women repeatedly return to abusive relationships hoping to resolve the conflict and thus to not see themselves or their marriages as failures; in addition, an abused woman often takes advantage of help and then goes back to her husband once the tension has subsided.<sup>96</sup> It is possible that the wife of Jeroboam returns because she is familiar with the cycle of abuse (tension build-up, anger, rage, and explosion; honeymoon period, tension build-up, anger, rage, and explosion, etc.).<sup>97</sup> She knows the habits of Jeroboam, her husband,

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<sup>92</sup> Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 74.

<sup>93</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 46.

<sup>94</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 48.

<sup>96</sup> Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 76.

<sup>97</sup> Women living in the cycle of abuse are constantly on guard and become so insecure they further isolate themselves (Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 47). A woman who is imprisoned in her home with no individual freedom to seek help does not seek help because she has been physically and psychologically locked into her situation (Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 47). Isolation becomes a habit, a mode of survival.

and calculates that the “timing” favours a somewhat peaceful time in her life. The wife of Jeroboam clearly acts in a passive, non-provoking way.<sup>98</sup> She provokes neither her husband nor the prophet.

Significantly, 1 Kings 14 gives no information about the wife of Jeroboam — her town, her age, her other children (if any), her physical appearance, or the names of her parents.<sup>99</sup> (Ironically, the town, tribe and mother of Jeroboam are named. He was an Ephramite from Zaredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah [1 Kgs 11:26]). However, social learning psychologists theorise that women who grow up in a home where they witness their mothers being beaten are more likely to become victims themselves.<sup>100</sup>

A modern example provides insight. For example, consider an affluent woman of today who lives in an abusive situation and is married to a man at the top of his career; she has children and is active in her community; she entertains regularly.<sup>101</sup> Yet in reality her “life is a nightmare,” McCue says.<sup>102</sup> She is embarrassed, ashamed. If one assumes that the wife of Jeroboam was in her time an affluent woman, the idea of a queen leaving the king would humiliate her nationally.

In today’s world, an affluent, abused woman rarely feels she can go to her family and/or friends. The husband manages the credit cards or they have jointly owned assets. In other words, even an affluent woman today often feels helpless in an abusive situation.<sup>103</sup> If a modern-day woman flees the domicile, she is charged with desertion in the divorce decree. When a wealthy woman runs from her abusive husband, she often loses her children, her home as well

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<sup>98</sup> The wife of Jeroboam is probably passive for good reason. Repeated battering, like electrical shocks, diminishes a woman’s motivation to respond. She becomes passive. Her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not believe her response will result in a favorable outcome. Moreover, having generalised her helplessness, the battered woman does not believe anything she does will alter the outcome. Subsequently, her sense of emotional well-being becomes precarious (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 73-74).

<sup>99</sup> The biblical text gives the names of the mothers of Rehoboam and Abijah, kings of Judah (1 Kgs 14:21; 15:1-2), for example. The text about Jeroboam’s successor, his son Nadab, contains no mention of Nadab’s mother (1 Kgs 15:25). 2 Chronicles 13:2, however, says his mother was Maacah, a daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

<sup>100</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 84.

<sup>101</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 85.

<sup>102</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 85.

<sup>103</sup> In present-day society a modern woman living in an abusive situation fears losing face within the community. To report a condition of domestic violence may isolate or cut her off from her community as well as from her family. In addition, an older woman who was brought up to keep her family problems private is much less able to reach out for help (McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 90).

as her social status.<sup>104</sup> Living in Israel c. 915 B.C.E., would the experience of Jeroboam's wife be any different?

A consistent finding shows that women separated from their abuser or divorced from him are more likely now in their single state to encounter abuse than are married women.<sup>105</sup> One study shows that 55 percent of assaults against separated women are made by males they knew and 15.6 percent of assaults on married women are domestic.<sup>106</sup>

It has been established that women who try to escape the cycle of abuse are beaten or killed. The act of leaving an abusive relationship is often followed by more abuse.<sup>107</sup> A Florida study showed that 57 percent of men who killed their wives were living apart from them at the time of the killing.<sup>108</sup> The most common reasons for the killing of a wife by a husband involve issues related to the husband: his experience of losing control and his fear of abandonment.<sup>109</sup> Did the wife of Jeroboam fear being killed? The text does not tell us, but from the story the reader knows Jeroboam's wife goes back, and the unsafe home she left has become more dangerous when she returns (see 1 Kgs 14, verses 1 and 17). The story of the wife of Jeroboam reinforces the fact found in current research on domestic violence, namely that it is a myth that the family home and the family itself are places of security and refuge.<sup>110</sup>

## G JEROBOAM'S WIFE: A CASE OF AN ABUSED WOMAN

A close reading of the biblical text shows that the wife of Jeroboam (like a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman in an abusive situation) has adopted a strategy for coping with abnormal and unusually frightening experiences.<sup>111</sup> Her strategy involves silence, denial, passivity, instant obedience, no dialogue, isolation, and minimalising herself.<sup>112</sup> Denial and minimalisation enable an abused woman to live with what is happening and to avoid feelings of terror and humiliation.<sup>113</sup> She adopts an attitude of learned helplessness.<sup>114</sup> Modern research makes this important observation: battered women may suffer a range of psychosocial

<sup>104</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 86.

<sup>105</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 113-114. McCue's work is an excellent source on abuse against women and is followed closely in this article.

<sup>106</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 114.

<sup>107</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 115.

<sup>108</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 115.

<sup>109</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 115.

<sup>110</sup> Gnanadason, *No Longer a Secret*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Wexler, *Violent Relationships*, 46.

<sup>112</sup> Coping skills include denial, minimalisation, anger, shock, nightmares, dissociation (see McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 100).

<sup>113</sup> In an actual battering event, shock and dissociation can numb the woman's mind and body while the assault takes place (McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 100).

<sup>114</sup> Clarke, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women*, 44.

problems not because they are sick but because they are battered.<sup>115</sup> Arguably because of her strategies for survival, the wife of Jeroboam plays an active role in her own victimisation.<sup>116</sup>

Research indicates that there are numerous health outcomes on the part of the woman who has or is experiencing violence. Mental health issues may include post-traumatic stress syndrome; depression; anxiety; phobias; panic attacks; eating disorders; sexual dysfunction; substance abuse; and low self-esteem.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, chronic health conditions from long-term abuse include irritable bowel syndrome; fibromyalgia; gastrointestinal disorders; and chronic pain syndrome.<sup>118</sup> The reactions of the wife of Jeroboam show symptoms associated with low self-esteem as well as depression.<sup>119</sup>

Her silence may indicate a pattern in her marriage of being blamed for everything. Staying quiet would make it less possible for Jeroboam to blame her. Current research indicates an abusing man often blames a woman because he feels a loss of control.<sup>120</sup> Her silence symbolises a retreat into an imaginary place where she is safe, where the community respects her, and where her husband is gentle toward her.<sup>121</sup>

The text emphasises the isolation of Jeroboam's wife. She confides in no friend, sheds no tears, and receives no safe or tender touch from Jeroboam, Ahijah, or God. She solicits no help from the royal court or faith community. It

<sup>115</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 100.

<sup>116</sup> Gelles, "No Place to Go," 57.

<sup>117</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, *Violence Against Women*, 6. Research confirms that exposure to long-term interpersonal violence increases the likelihood of mental health problems for a woman. These include a heightened risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse (Kristina A. Hedtke, Kenneth J. Ruggiero, Monica M. Fitzgerald, Heidi M. Zinzow, Benjamin E. Saunders, Heidi S. Resnick, & Dean G. Kilpatrick, "A Longitudinal Investigation of Interpersonal Violence in Relation to Mental Health and Substance Use" *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. August 2008 76(4): 633-647).

<sup>119</sup> Research indicates that women with poor quality social bonds showed over time an acute drop in self-esteem which, in turn, led to acute increases in health problems (Danu Anthony Stinson, Christine Logel, Mark P. Zanna, John G.I Holmes, Jessica J. Cameron, Joanne V. Wood, Steven J. Spencer. "The Cost of Lower Self-Esteem: Testing a Self-and Social-Bonds Model of Health." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. March 2008 94(3): 412-428.

<sup>120</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 109.

<sup>121</sup> See Clarke, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women*, 61.

would seem she lives in an unsafe situation and has no support system she can trust.<sup>122</sup> In modern parlance she has no sister support.<sup>123</sup>

Although she sees few alternatives to what can be interpreted as a loveless and abusive situation, she is a survivor. Survival strategies are important for overcoming abuse. They enable women to cope with the day-to-day chaos of living a home life filled with violence and danger. One such strategy is learned helplessness;<sup>124</sup> via the technique of learned helplessness, an abused person dissociates, self-hypnotises, and distances herself (emotionally, at least) from her situation.<sup>125</sup>

It is thought that a battered spouse has only three choices: to leave, to stay and risk psychological death or to stay and choose to kill her abuser. Arguably by going back, the wife of Jeroboam chooses to stay and experience a psychological death. Her silence indicates in all likelihood depression that resulted from what is known today as post traumatic stress syndrome.<sup>126</sup> The story does not reveal a condition called Disintegration Anxiety, but if her actions can be interpreted as a serious loss of initiative, a profound drop in self-esteem, and a sense of total meaninglessness,<sup>127</sup> one can postulate disintegration anxiety if she lived today.

The silence of Jeroboam's wife can be interpreted as a sign of her suffering. Whereas a woman's sense of self and sense of worth often are determined by the input and opinions of others,<sup>128</sup> Jeroboam's treatment of his wife arguably can be regarded as contempt of her and a denigration of her as a person.

Their marriage, in contrast to that of David and Bathsheba, displays no statement of faith, or action of seeking of God together. Both couples faced the illness and death of a son. But David openly sought the Lord; he fasted, prayed, repented, and asked the Lord to spare the unnamed baby (2 Sam 12:15-18). When he learned of the baby's death, David got up from the ground, washed himself, put on clean clothes, worshiped the Lord, ate, "and comforted his wife Bathsheba" (12:19-20, 24). The Book of Kings gives no indication that Jeroboam or his wife fasted, prayed, worshiped, or mourned together about

<sup>122</sup> Christine A Courtois, "Complex Trauma, Complex Reactions: Assessment and Treatment (Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, August 2008 (1): 86-100).

<sup>123</sup> See Linda H. Hollies, *Sister, Save Yourself!* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 58, 94.

<sup>124</sup> See Clarke, *Pastoral Care of Battered Women*, 44.

<sup>125</sup> Dutton, *The Abusive Personality*, 42.

<sup>126</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 100.

<sup>127</sup> McCue, *Domestic Violence*, 99.

<sup>128</sup> Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Lies Women Believe and the Truth That Sets Them Free* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 66.



their son. Sadly, it likewise gives no indication that Jeroboam comforted his wife.

## H CONCLUSION

Why is the wife of Jeroboam silent, mute, ultra obedient and seemingly passionless and lifeless in I Kings 14? I do not believe she was passionless and colourless and lifeless as a young girl; I believe she became that way in response to her life in her marriage. Jeroboam, described as a man of standing, a *hayil*, would have married a woman of like character and disposition. He would not have married a simpleton — a bimbo, to use a modern word.<sup>129</sup>

I venture that the downward spiral of Jeroboam's character from a *hayil* to the standard of evil in his generation and for subsequent evaluations of kings in the Northern Kingdom is mirrored by his wife. Her portrayal in this chapter is consistent with one kind of reaction to abuse. The relationship between Jeroboam and his wife shows "a family likeness" to an abusive relationship.

The wife of Jeroboam tries in all ways to avoid confrontation. She tries to please, does exactly what Jeroboam says, and downplays herself. Her silence can be a retreat into an inner sanctum of protection. She presents a portrait of a woman who has no vibrancy or life — and that kind of woman would not have initially attracted a man like Jeroboam, a leader of Solomon's builders and a man to whom God gave ten tribes. God signalled out Jeroboam in I Kings 11. I believe that her personality, as seen in this last episode of the Jeroboam cycle, has been formed by the treatment of her by her husband over a period of many years of marriage, as this vignette in 1 Kings 14 shows.

Jeroboam's wife plays an important role in the biblical text because of the prophecy she receives. Although she is unnamed in the story and therefore downplayed, God's plan to uproot and scatter Israel is revealed first to her. Her return home sets in motion events that lead to her son's death, to the destruction of her household, and to the overthrow of Israel. Obedient, mysterious, and mute, she nonetheless figures prominently in Israel's history because of the significance of the prophetic word given to her. If indeed she is abused, God's judgment against Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 14:9) significantly expands the concept and definition of evil past idolatry to include abuse. Her society cannot or does not hold Jeroboam I accountable — but God does.<sup>130</sup> Thus the text — and God — accord the wife of Jeroboam more dignity and relevance than do her husband, her society, and traditional scholars.

<sup>129</sup> There is ample evidence in the biblical text that like marries like. Consider these marriages: Ruth and Boaz, Jezebel and Ahab, Abigail and David (1 Sam 25), the Proverbs 31 woman and her husband, and the Aramean general Naaman and his wife (2 Kgs 5).

<sup>130</sup> See Hollies, *Sister, Save Yourself!* 80.

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Robin Gallaher Branch is Professor in Biblical Studies at Crichton College, Memphis, Tennessee, USA. She is also Extraordinary Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. E-mail: [rgbranch@crichton.edu](mailto:rgbranch@crichton.edu)