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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AS MODELED BY THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

Kelly L. Schmidt

The Bible offers many models of women displaying both formal and informal leadership. The story of the five daughters of Zelophehad found in Numbers 27:1-7 is an example of strategic leadership operating from a marginalized position in society. Operating within a patriarchal culture, the daughters overcame cultural and legal challenges to claim their rightful inheritance. Using the socio-rhetorical hermeneutic, this paper analyzes the social, cultural, and sacred textures to bring insight to the text. The actions of the daughters are then critiqued using the framework of strategic leadership, as suggested by Hughes et al. (2014), to see how the daughters utilized strategic thinking, acting, and influence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible has many examples of women who sought to exercise leadership, although Classens (2013) pointed out that the portrayal of female leadership in the Bible is complex in its nature. Given the cultural orientation of male hierarchy and patriarchal ordering in ancient Israel (Hurley, 1981; Martos & Hégy, 1998; Swartley, 1983), the leadership of women was expressed in a myriad of ways. Female leadership was rarely appointed or formally recognized (e.g., Abigail, Miriam). At times, this leadership manifested through nefarious or clandestine ways (e.g., Delilah, Jezebel, Rachel). Women's leadership needed to react to the choices of their husbands or other men in their lives (e.g., Dinah, Ruth). Often leadership was expressed in response to the poor decisions made by other leaders around them (e.g., Zipporah, Esther, Deborah). The women in the Bible did exercise leadership regardless of their cultural context. Examining Biblical models may give insight to contemporary women leaders as they

navigate their own dynamics and barriers in the context of leadership (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rhode, 2017).

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad demonstrated women operating successfully within a patriarchal culture. After analyzing the texts which develop the story, the actions of the five daughters will be examined in reference to the frame presented by Hughes, Beatty, and Dinwoodie (2014) that proposes strategic leadership as an integrated process involving thinking, acting and influencing, which is best done in collaboration with others.

Using Robbins' (1996) socio-rhetorical hermeneutic, this paper explores an event that occurred in the development of the nation of Israel in Numbers 27:1-7 concerning the daughters of Zelophehad. By incorporating aspects of anthropology and sociology, the socio-rhetorical method analyzes a variety of dynamic textures that help to position the periscope and its interpretation based on social and cultural location (Robbins, 1996). Of the five elements of socio-rhetorical criticism, this article highlights social and cultural textual analysis and sacred textural analysis.

Background on the Book of Numbers

The book of Numbers is found within the first five books of the Bible, commonly referred to as the Torah or the Pentateuch. Clines (1997) argued that the overarching theme of these five books is the response to the promise given by God to Abraham in Genesis 12-15. The three components of this promise include 1) a multitude of descendants, 2) a special relationship between God and the people, and 3) a promised land (Clines, 1997). The totality of the Pentateuch recounts the partial fulfillment of this promise, while the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy place particular emphasis on the land aspect of the promise, which is finally fulfilled in the book of Joshua (Clines, 1997).

Numbers is structured around three sections related to location: Mt. Sinai, Kadesh-barnea, and the plains of Moab, and it recounts the migration of the Israelites toward the Promised Land (Ashley, 1993). The primary texts concerning the daughters of Zelophehad are found in the third section of the book (Num. 27:1-7, 36:1-13). Ulrich (1998) noted that the placement of the event in relation to the two censuses taken of the people of Israel, the second which happened in Numbers 26, gives it significance as a call to remember the covenantal arrangement God had given the patriarchs. Most scholars place particular emphasis on the story based on the unusual act of naming the daughters (Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah) rather than listing them only via a male relative (Grossman, 2007; Sakenfeld, 1988; Ron, 1998; Shemesh, 2007). Aaron (2009), who agreed with the significance of including the names of the daughters rather than just leaving them known only as "Zelophehad's daughters," ultimately concluded that the whole encounter is a fictional case, yet his opinion is the exception to most research.

Numbers 27:1-7 tells the story of Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah (the five daughters of Zelophehad) who were part of the clan of Manasseh descended from Joseph. Their father, Zelophehad, died with no sons, leaving the family in danger of receiving no land inheritance. After their father's death and against cultural precedent, the five daughters approached Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the entire Israelite

assembly and asked for their share of the family's inheritance (Num. 27:2). Faced with a cultural dilemma, Moses inquired of the Lord, who confirmed that the daughters should receive their father's inheritance regardless of the practice of the times (Num. 5-11).

The five daughters are reencountered in Numbers 36:1-13 because the heads of the clan of Manasseh are concerned with how marriage might impact the future of the land inheritance. If the daughters marry men from other tribes, this land would be lost to the clan (Num. 36:3-4). After consulting with the Lord, Moses stated that the daughters must marry within their own clan so that the land inheritance will remain within the tribe (Num. 36:5-9). The daughters responded in obedience to this command (Num. 36:10-13).

Finally, the story of the daughters asking for their inheritance was refreshed in Joshua 17:1-6. Joshua, Moses' successor, who is leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, is now tasked with distributing the land allotments. Because time has passed since Moses gave his pronouncement, the daughters again approached the leaders, including Joshua and Eleazar, and remind them of what Moses had said. Joshua complied, and the tribe of Manasseh received a share of ten tracts of land.

II. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TEXTUAL EXEGESIS

Examining the social and cultural texture gives insight into the context and dynamics faced by the figures presented in the text (Robbins, 1996). Weingreen (1966) stated that the story of the daughters of Zelophehad should be understood as a legal action intersecting with two social and cultural principles: the patriarchal ordering of the family unit and the economic implications of the inheritance laws.

Patriarchal Ordering

The culture of the Israelites was patriarchal in its emphasis on male leadership and male heirs. This type of social order was reflected in other cultures of the same time (Babylonian and Assyrian). Patriarchical ordering meant that family life centered around the senior male, with women and children viewed as commodities (Breyfogle, 1910; Hurley, 1981; Laffey, 1988; Martos & Hégy, 1998). Some scholars believe this implies that women were seen as inferior (e.g., Douglas, 1982; Litke, 2002), while some do not (e.g., Hurley, 1981). Breyfogle (1910) noted that women were dependent on a father or husband. A woman had no legal standing for divorce and was valued for her ability to produce a male heir (Breyfogle, 1910).

Inheritance Law

Israel was patrilineal (descent follows the male line) (Freeman, 1992; Hurley, 1981). Furthermore, the land was the critical unit of economic sufficiency, especially for the family unit (Freeman, 1992). Thus, Freeman (1992) noted that families were protected by the "principle of inalienability" (p. 763). "This was the rule that the land should remain in the family to which it had been apportioned, and could not be sold permanently outside the family" (Freeman, 1992, p. 763-4). Deuteronomy 21:15-17

stated that land was passed down to male children (with the firstborn male receiving a double-portion), establishing a clear sense of societal order (Freeman, 1992).

Analysis of Numbers 27:1-11

In Numbers 27:4, the daughters of Zelophehad stated that the request they brought to Moses was not for their own sake but for the sake of their father's name. So important was the cultural appeal to patrilineality that it superseded the gender prescriptions. Much to the chagrin of modern feminists, Jewish scholars suggest that this was the motivating factor for the courage of the daughters, projecting their motivation as "If our father had had a son, we would not have spoken" (Kadari, 2009, para. 5).

When the daughters approached Moses and gave their position, they stated that their father had "died in the wilderness" but not as a follower of Korah. This is a reference to Numbers 16, which described an uprising led by Korah, who was disgruntled at the leadership of Moses and Aaron (Douglas, 1982). The grievance of this rebellion was its inherent disdain for the authority of God and those whom He had appointed as leaders. The daughters of Zelophehad remind Moses of the trustworthiness of their family heritage: their father had remained loyal to God and Moses during this time of rebellion (Num. 27:3-4). This sentiment might also have acted as an assurance that their current request was not to be interpreted as a violation of the established social order. Keil and Delitzsch (1975) argue for the gravity of a family line becoming extinct within this cultural context. As part of their appeal, the daughters urged Moses to consider the negative implications of their family line disappearing. So significant was the appeal of the daughters of Zelophehad, that, according to Numbers 27:5-11, Moses enacted a permanent change to the inheritance laws of the nation of Israel (Exell, 1975).

III. SACRED TEXTUAL EXEGESIS

Examining the sacred textual element allows one to explore how the text speaks about God and his relationship with people. This is especially important to consider given that Moses directly consulted God on a legal issue (Num. 27:5), which was not his typical response. Milgrom (1990) suggested this showed Moses' weakness, while others noted it highlights the initiative of the daughters (Grossman, 2007; Shemesh, 2007) as well as the real focus on the divine relationship (Litke, 2002). Robins (1996) used eight different sacred textures for analysis, and this event highlights two: human commitment and religious community.

Human Commitment as Sacred Texture

The texts concerning the daughters of Zelophehad emphasize an effort of human initiative and commitment. The first issue concerns the right to continued lineage and land inheritance (Num. 27:1-11). The five daughters recognized the significance of both issues and were willing to advocate for them. However, Litke (2002) stated that the actions of the daughters of Zelophehad show a deeper issue of continued inclusion in

the nation of Israel. "The issue is not whether or not the daughters inherit but whether they and their family count as Israelites and so should be awarded land by the Sovereign" (Litke, 2002, p. 214). This is seen in the connection between the census taking in Numbers 26 (to determine the nature of land grants) and the petition of the daughters to be included in receiving a land grant.

Religious Community as Sacred Texture

In Numbers 36:1-13, the implications of the daughters of Zelophehad's petition are explored by the community: what will happen to the land when they marry? Of concern were the rules of marriage, which transfer land possession if the daughters marry outside the tribe (Num. 36:3-4). The request for the daughters' inheritance is likely overshadowed by preserving patrimonial rights and tribal economics (Sakenfeld, 1988). Litke (2002) proposed that the possession of the land was integrally tied to the identity of Israel, that lack of land was tantamount to the loss of community. Key in the text is that the daughters have no intention of overthrowing the cultural order and agree with the new instructions, satisfying all parties involved.

Gevaryahu (2013) observed that the events of the daughters of Zelophehad highlight three different relationships: preserving the name of the *family*, preserving the integrity of the *tribe*, and preserving a connection to the *nation* of Israel. The request of the daughters of Zelophehad gets to the heart of the Abrahamic covenant: that the people of Israel were promised legacy, land, and a special relationship with God (Ulrich, 1998).

The Legacy of the Daughters of Zelophehad

Various Biblical commentators praised the significance of the actions of Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Renowned evangelical pastor Ray Stedman called them daring examples of faith. He wrote:

Their daring request moved him [Moses], for there is never faith without venturing. You must leave the crowd; you must leave the gang or the herd, and step out on a divine possibility before you have exercised faith. That is why faith is so liberating. (Stedman, 1964)

C. H. Spurgeon (1909) urged his listeners to imitate their faith as well as their determination, prudence, and devotion. Elisabeth Cady Stanton used the daughters of Zelophehad as an example of how women should stand up for justice (Classens, 2013). Hopkins (1939) suggested that this was the first request for women's rights noted in the Bible. However, other scholars, such as Shemesh (2007) and Aaron (2009), claimed that this view surpasses the intent of the text.

IV. LEADERSHIP THEORY

Just as the interpretation of Biblical text is influenced by social and cultural voices, so is the application of leadership principles in contemporary contexts. The actions of the daughters of Zelophehad in navigating the social, cultural, and sacred dynamics of this petition deserve consideration for contemporary relevance. They successfully presented

a difficult request amid a culture in which they were not dominant power players that resulted in a foundational shift in inheritance law. This could not have been done without some form of intentionality. Hughes et al. (2014) stated that strategic leadership creates enduring change through intentional thinking, acting, and influence. These elements may be found within the story of the daughters of Zelophehad.

Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking considers the interconnected systems and complicated relationships of both internal and external forces (Hughes et al., 2014). It is striking that the daughters of Zelophehad had enough foresight to bring this issue to Moses long before it was a relevant issue. The Israelites were not yet in the Promised Land, and although preparation was being made for land division, it would take time for it to happen. This shows a tremendous sense of agency on the part of the daughters and is another component necessary for the effective leadership of women (Bandura, 2001). In addition, according to Hughes et al. (2014), the daughters employed two helpful tools of strategic thinking: reframing and making common sense.

Reframing. The daughters of Zelophehad had to keep in mind the principles of their social order and cultural values. "Reframing is the ability to see things differently, including new ways of thinking about an organization's strategic challenges...It involves questioning or restarting the implicit beliefs and assumptions that are often taken for granted" (Hughes et al., 2014, p. 79). The circumstances of the petition of the daughters of Zelophehad are compelling. Jewish scholars suggest that at the time of the meeting, Moses was discussing the details of levirate marriage, which examines the familial responsibilities to provide an heir for a widow (Kadari, 2009). One Midrash proposed a lively debate where the daughters' catch Moses in an inconsistency of logic (Bacon, 2003). Regardless of the circumstances, it is clear that the daughters were able to bring to light an unjust situation that needed to be addressed (Shemesh, 2007). Not only were the daughters able to engage in the thoughtful discourse of scripture, but they also reframed the situation in a new way to bolster their point and gain approval from those in power.

Making Common Sense. Strategic leaders help others to make sense of their context, which is both a skill and art (Hughes et al., 2014). Communication is essential and must be done in multiple ways to be effective. Torbert (2001) stated that four interwoven parts mark effective communication: framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring. In their appeal to Moses, the daughters use all four modes. First, they framed the context: "Our father died...and left no sons" (Num. 27:3). They advocated for a desired course of action: "Give us property" (Num. 27:4). They illustrated with stories to make their point: Our father "was not among Korah's followers...but he died for his own sin" (Num. 27:3). Finally, they used a question to make an inquiry: "Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son?" (Num. 27:4). The use of multiple approaches for communication helps in the sense-making process because it gives a leader a deeper repertoire for communication.

Strategic Acting

Strategic acting is concerned with both short-term and long-term initiatives (Hughes et al., 2014). It recognizes that specific actions produce a discernable advantage. The daughters of Zelophehad displayed an insightful ability to translate their complicated situation into a plan of action that impacted their present and future. This aspect receives much praise from Biblical commentators (Exell, 1975; Spurgeon, 1909). Hughes et al. (2014) suggested that to act strategically, a leader must have a clarity of focus, as well as the ability to adapt with agility. This is seen in two dimensions of the plan of the daughters: how they approached Moses in the tabernacle and how they responded to the concerns of the people.

Clarity of Focus. Strategic action is a combination of decisions designed to impact the outcomes of an organization or context (Hughes et al., 2014). This suggests that the strategic leader knows "what not to do as well as what to do" (Hughes et al., 2014, p. 112). The daughters' presentation of their request strategically followed cultural protocols without violating them. The daughters approached Moses and the leaders at the entrance to the tent but did not enter. Ron (1998) proposed that shows both bravery and wisdom, as they appeal directly to the highest court, which was mostly male-dominated, yet did so in a respectful manner. Tempered radicalism is a change theory that suggests that those on the "inside" of a system can exert change through long term influence (Meyerson, 2008). The idea is that one can work from within the system to both affirm and bring change to the organization. This method is especially useful when a leader cannot operate from a heroic standpoint (Kelan & Wratil, 2018). As such, the daughters of Zelophehad "played by the rules" in bringing their grievance to leadership, and this approach allowed them to be heard without being perceived as a threat.

The Ability to Adapt. The ability to adapt with agility suggests that a leader is able to respond to instability and conflict with grace and effectiveness (Hughes et al., 2014). The request of the daughters had long-term implications for the tribe of Manasseh. When the five daughters made their request, none of them were married (Shemesh, 2007). But as time passed, it became feasible that one or more might marry into a different tribe. Inheritance laws dictated that property belonged to the husband when the woman married (Freedman, 1992). Therefore, the leaders of the Manasseh tribe become concerned that they would lose portions of their land inheritance in the future, which had severe economic implications. An essential aspect of Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Theory is its attention to the element of loss. The risk of loss makes people avoid change (Hughes et al. 2014). Adaptive leadership suggests that loss is best identified and processed so that its power to derail change is minimized (Heifetz et al., 2009). The people's concern was a legitimate one, and as the five daughters were able to respond to the potential conflict and modify their strategic expectations, all parties were satisfied.

Strategic Influence

The ability to influence is a crucial leadership skill (Goleman, 2000). Within the strategic process, it is the capacity to inspire others toward the adoption of the proposed goal(s) (Hughes et al., 2014). A key to developing influence is the ability to foster relationships, both inside and outside the organization (Hughes et al., 2014). Influence may be more difficult and require a political approach depending on the positional power a leader possesses (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The daughters of Zelophehad used political influence to achieve their strategic goal by invoking cultural core values and strategic societal drivers in connection to critical relationships.

The Power of Relationships. The complexities of strategic leadership are mitigated by a thoughtful involvement of crucial relationships and teams. Attempting change as a lone individual is extremely difficult. Hughes et al. (2014) defined the importance of a strategic team as "the confluence of information in an organization" (p. 198). People are unified around vision and values, and augment the strengths and weaknesses of one another in pursuit of their goals. The five daughters themselves may be viewed as the first strategic team in this story. Winterblotham (1978) suggested that in the initial meeting with Moses, it is likely that the girls were young, possibly still in their teens, as they were all unmarried. Hughes et al. (2014) state, "strategic leaders can't achieve success by themselves" (p. 146). It is plausible that the strength of their numbers gave them courage and wisdom beyond what they would have possessed individually. Moreover, the five daughters also invoked a strategic relationship with Moses, the person of the highest authority among the Israelites. Lias (1978) pointed out that this was likely Moses' last case of judgment. Moses' influence, even his apparent sponsorship of the five daughters, carried great weight with the Israelites. Perhaps the end of his tenure allowed him to move with a boldness he would not have previously been able to rally at an earlier time. Having the right coalition of people is vital to helping strategic change move forward (Kotter, 1996). Moses' influence and authority helped to set a cultural shift in motion.

Political Influence and Key Drivers. Influence stems from an ability to "engage the hearts of the people and engender commitment to strategic goals" (Hughes et al., 2014, p. 186). The primary way to do this is to connect organizational aspirations to the strategic goal. Strategic influence is highly effective when a leader understands the core values driving an organization or group (Hughes et al., 2014). The daughters of Zelophehad did this by prioritizing a key strategic driver of the culture: the family lineage. Sakenfeld (1988) suggested that the cultural driver of the preserving the family line would have been more persuasive to the Israelite community than a general appeal for rights by the daughters. The danger that the family line would be done away, especially in light of their father's refusal to participate in Korah's rebellion, was presented as an injustice (Shemesh, 2007). Citing Korah's rebellion and disassociating the family from it, according to Aaron (2009), may also represent a political move that suggested that the daughters' request was not to be associated with any form of rebellion. Hughes et al. (2014) pointed out that political influence and strategic drivers, when prioritized, clarify the direction and choices that should be made to reach the desired outcome (Hughes et al., 2014).

V. CONCLUSION

Not everyone views the daughters of Zelophehad as a strategic triumph. Classen (2013) is particularly cautious about elevating the status of the daughters of Zelophehad, noting: "Even though it would be wonderful to view the story...as a legal breakthrough benefiting womankind, a remarkable instance of female agency with a positive outcome, feminist critics have pointed out...it still preserves the status quo" (p. 326). However, this fails to keep in mind a truth about strategic leadership: it is about trade-offs. Hughes et al. (2014) wisely state, "By its nature, a good strategy is not all things to all people. A good strategy is clearly centered on a few key priorities" (p. 100). It should also be noted that female leaders do not operate from a monolithic context. Marginalized groups are often well-practiced in reading and responding to complicated cultural and relational dynamics. Operating from a standing of little or no power, confronting a culture ordered by patriarchy, and having the foresight to envision and claim an inheritance in a land not yet apprehended is remarkable. So remarkable that commentators offer backhanded compliments such as this: "They were but women, yet they had all a man's decision and courage – and more than belongs to most men – to break way from all conventional notions rather than tamely submit to injustice" (Winterbotham, 1978, p. 365). The daughters of Zelophehad serve as an example that personal agency and strategic influence are possible even from a marginalized position. Furthermore, due to this reality, women leaders may become adept at using their influence in political and non-traditional ways. The actions of the daughters of Zelophehad changed Jewish law forever. Hughes et al. (2014) offer a final thought about what strategic leadership takes: "It demands that leaders be clear about what drives them so that they can authentically navigate the political landscape, be able to see and understand other perspectives, and be patient and persistent to continue influencing as strategic initiatives unfold" (p. 147). This is certainly an appropriate description of the five daughters of Zelophehad.

About the Author

Kelly L. Schmidt is a Ph.D. candidate in the Organizational Leadership program at Eastern University, St. Davids, PA. She received her MA in Strategic Leadership from Life Pacific University, San Dimas, CA. An ordained pastor with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, she has served as a Discipleship and Small Groups Pastor for the past 15 years. She has the privilege of teaching strategic leadership and change management as an adjunct professor at LPU. Her research interests include change management, strategic leadership, women in leadership, training and development, and adult learning.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kelly Schmidt at kellylorenschmidt@gmail.com.

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